YOUR TOP-RATED CARS, SUVs & TRUCKS

Get Phones and Laptops Fixed Fast p.34

Chocolate Treats That Contain Heavy Metals p.14

CR Consumer Reports®

MARCH 2024

RATINGS & REVIEWS

- Dishwashers
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New Charitable Gift Annuitants

Hans F. Bowker • Carl Duvel • Jerry Sass • Linda G. Schmidt, In Memory of Marjorie E. Schmid • Anonymous (7)

New Legacy Society Members

Rowena Adachi • Rima & Michael Apple • Ann Bornstein • Lisa Cribari & Raymond Infarinato • Lydia Beth Leimbach • Sharon L. Nelson • John & Tricia Walther • Anonymous (303)

Contents

MARCH 2024, VOL. 89 NO. 3

Mattress Shopping Made Easier
Use our ratings and expert advice to uncover your perfect match—at the right price.

P. **24**

24 **Find a Mattress You'll Love**
Ready to sleep better? Here's how to choose the best bed for your body and budget.
RATINGS

34 **Get Your Phone, Laptop, WiFi Fixed–Fast**
Try these quick solutions for common tech problems–and learn the easiest ways to get help when you need it.

38 **Are These "Healthy" Drinks Good for You?**
CR's food pros weigh in on which of the new "wellness" beverages have real health benefits–and which just sound like they do.

44 **7 Hidden Fees–and How to Avoid Them**
Those extra charges tacked onto everything from airline tickets to food deliveries can really add up. Here's where you're most likely to see them, and what you can do to pay less.

PRODUCTS RATED IN THIS ISSUE

DISHWASHERS
P. 8

INTERIOR PAINTS
P. 9

COFFEE MAKERS
P. 11

TOASTER OVENS
P. 18

DODGE HORNET
P. 58

PHOTO, COVER: SHUTTERSTOCK. PHOTO, THIS PAGE: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS (DODGE)

Contents

Fan Favorites
These are the most satisfying cars to own, according to CR members.

P. 50

5 **Building a Better World, Together**
Working to ban water beads, pushing for electric bike and scooter standards, and making assisted driving safer.

6 **Your Feedback**
Readers' comments about our recent content.

17 **Recalls**
60 **Index**
61 **The Better Deal**

DEPARTMENTS & COLUMNS

8 **What We're Testing in Our Labs ...**
Dishwashers, carry-on luggage, interior paints, and more.
RATINGS

10 **Ask Our Experts**
Advice on cleaning cloudy headlights, fixing credit report errors, and making an open bottle of wine last longer.

P. 16

11 **CR Insights**
Our top-rated, most versatile coffee makers, smart ways to save on groceries, the best duvets, and more.
RATINGS

PRODUCT UPDATE

18 **The Best New Toaster Ovens From Our Tests**
Today's top models aren't just for toast: Many air-fry, bake bread, and more. Here's how to pick a great one.
RATINGS

IN EVERY ISSUE

4 **From the President: Trust in Our Testing**
CR is here to help you buy the best and safest products on the market—and enjoy them for as long as possible.

ROAD REPORT

49 **Ahead of the Curve**
Auto ratings, news, and advice.

50 **These Are the Cars Owners Love Most**
Our owner satisfaction survey reveals the vehicles that owners would buy or lease again.
RATINGS

56 **Cars That Are Really Fun to Drive**
These fast, agile models are safe, efficient, and reliable, too.

57 **Road Test**
We test the Toyota Grand Highlander, Alfa Romeo Tonale, Dodge Hornet, and Mercedes-Benz GLC.
RATINGS

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From the President

Trust in Our Testing

CONSUMER REPORTS is committed to being your trusted source—the place you turn to for rigorous, unbiased testing and candid feedback from other consumers. We want to help you make smart decisions on the products and services that best suit your needs and help you extend the life of the products you've invested in.

That's why the mattress ratings you'll find in this month's cover story reflect not only our extensive lab testing—which includes running a 300-plus-pound wooden roller across each mattress 30,000 times to simulate years of use—but also honest feedback from CR members, who tell us all about the mattresses they've been sleeping on.

"These Are the Cars Owners Love Most," on page 50, presents a detailed look at satisfaction levels, based on data collected from the drivers of more than 330,000 vehicles. And for our auto reliability ratings—highlights of which you can find online at **CR.org/reliability**—we survey car owners about everything from squeaky brakes to failed transmissions.

When products do need repair, we're here to help you get them up and running again. Check out our article on what to do when your phones, computers, and other tech devices stop working (on page 40). We have also pushed state and federal lawmakers to pass "right to repair" laws, which require manufacturers to supply consumers and independent repair shops with the necessary parts, tools, and manuals to fix what's broken. Too often, those parts are available only at "authorized" repair dealers, which can be far more expensive. Or the manufacturer makes it impossible to repair a device at all, forcing you to buy new products.

CR doesn't just help you buy the right stuff. We're also here to help you enjoy it for as long as possible.

Marta Tellado

Marta L. Tellado,
President and CEO
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PHOTO: VICTORIA WILL

Dangerous Toy Alert

A CR investigation last September exposed the dangers posed by water beads, small gel balls sold as toys for children to squeeze and play with. Water beads expand dramatically when soaked in water: Some are as tiny as a cupcake sprinkle but can grow to the size of a marble, while others are the size of a small grape and can grow as big as a golf ball. The problem is that the beads can find their way into the digestive tracts, ears, noses, and lungs of babies and toddlers, where they can contribute to hearing loss, infections, bowel obstructions, blocked airways, and even death.

Following CR's investigation, we urged retailers to stop selling water beads and supported federal legislation to ban their sale as toys. We also worked with Ashley Haugen, who founded a nonprofit called That Water Bead Lady after her child was seriously injured by water beads, to collect more than 100,000 signatures for petitions calling for a ban on the sale of water beads. We delivered those petitions to the Consumer Product Safety Commission in November.

The mounting pressure is working: In December, Amazon, Michaels, Target, and Walmart told CR they would no longer allow water beads to be sold if they are being marketed for children, and the online marketplaces AliExpress and Etsy said they now prohibit the sale of water beads entirely.

That's good news, but these dangerous products still pose a danger to children, so CR is continuing to push for a broad, mandatory ban on them. You can help by signing our petition at **CR.org/banwaterbeads**.

7,800

Number of ER visits linked to water beads from 2016 to 2022.

SOURCE: CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION

ACTION UPDATE

A 2022 CR investigation into a rash of deadly lithium-ion battery fires found that only a tiny fraction of e-bikes, e-scooters, and similar devices comply with a crucial safety standard. That spurred the Consumer Product Safety Commission to threaten noncomplying manufacturers, retailers, and importers with enforcement actions. Now the House Committee on Energy and Commerce has approved—in a unanimous, bipartisan vote—a CR-endorsed bill that would lead to a mandatory safety standard. The full House is expected to vote on the measure this year.

Safer Assisted Driving

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Numerous federal investigations have found that Tesla's Autopilot active driving assistance system had been in use in the lead-up to multiple deadly auto crashes.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

For more than five years, CR has called on Tesla to do more to prevent drivers from using Autopilot when they aren't in control of their vehicle or when they are in situations that the system wasn't designed for.

In December, the automaker agreed to recall more than 2 million cars equipped with Autopilot, issuing an "over the air" software update that will, among other things, make visual driver alerts more prominent and create a five-strike penalty that disables Autopilot for drivers who repeatedly ignore warnings to apply steering or look at the road.

But CR auto safety experts say the new software doesn't do enough to prevent misuse or address the root causes of driver inattention. We're now calling on the company to go further in addressing ongoing safety concerns, including our test track finding that Tesla drivers can easily block their in-car driver monitoring cameras.

CR is also pushing for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to be given more power to force recalls when a company drags its feet.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Find recall information for your car using CR's recall tracker, at **CR.org/carrecalls**. And you can read our latest ratings of many automakers' active driving assistance (ADA) systems, at **CR.org/adasystems**. (Ford/Lincoln's BlueCruise and General Motors' Super Cruise are currently the top-rated.)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

CR'S GUIDE TO
Better, Safe
Drinking W
Many Americans still drink wat
unhealthy levels of toxic chem
metals, bacteria, and other co
Here's how to test yours and
THE MOST RELIABLE CARS, SUVs & TRUCKS
BEST PET INSURANCE
THE RIGHT LIGHTS FOR EVERY ROOM
CR Consumer Reports
JANUARY 2024
RATINGS & REVIEWS
Blood Pressure Monitors
Toaster Ovens
Cordless Vacuums
Smart Speakers
Glass Cleaners
Door Locks
YOUR GUIDE TO
Better, Safer Drinking Water
Toxic chemicals and bacteria threaten our nation's tap water. Here's how to test yours, and clean it up.

Our January 2024 cover story, **"CR's Guide to Better, Safer Drinking Water,"** offered expert advice on how to test for lead, PFAS, and bacteria, and the best ways to clean up your water. Readers shared their thoughts and questions. To add yours, head to **CR.org/waterguide**.

THANKS FOR YOUR ARTICLE about testing and treating household drinking water. This past year our well water tested positive for E. coli bacteria—and it tested positive again after we chlorinated the well. Our water treatment expert added an ultraviolet light to our existing whole-house water filter. Our water tested negative for E. coli and other bacteria after this installation. We also decided to test our water for lead, as a precaution, because our house was built before the regulation of lead pipes. We were told that if your water has a pH of 6 or higher, it means you do not have lead in your water.
—Janis Richter, Rochelle, VA

WRITE

Go to **CR.org/lettertoeditor** to share your comments for publication.

EDITOR'S NOTE *Ultraviolet light can be an effective way to kill bacteria. One of our recommended countertop water filters, the Amway eSpring 10-0188, uses that technology. It's also certified to reduce lead and PFAS in drinking water. But it comes with a hefty price: $1,179. Water with a pH level below 7 is more acidic, and thus more likely to leach lead from old pipes. However, having a pH level above 7 doesn't guarantee that your water is free of lead. The only way to know for sure is to test.*

I DID NOT see any mention of pharmaceuticals in the water supply in this article. I have read that a large amount has been measured in waters such as the Great Lakes and that there's concern this could lead to medical issues over time. Any thoughts?
—Richard Bourassa, Glendale, AZ

EDITOR'S NOTE *In the January issue, we did include pharmaceuticals as one of many unregulated categories of concern. They're released into the water supply as a byproduct of the drug manufacturing process and via human and animal waste, and aren't filtered out by the wastewater treatment process. While the amount of medication you're exposed to through drinking water is probably very small, some experts worry that long-term exposure to a combination of the many drugs found in our water supply could pose unexpected health risks to humans and aquatic life. Choosing a water filter that's certified to remove all of the contaminants listed in NSF standard 401 can help reduce your exposure to unwanted pharmaceuticals, pesticides, and other contaminants. (Find one at nsf.org/certified/dwtu.) And dispose of your leftover medications by taking them to a local pharmacy—not by flushing them down the toilet.*

BLOOD PRESSURE TESTING

IN "WHY THE BEST PLACE to Check Your Blood Pressure May Be at Home," you included a table that states that a blood pressure of higher than 180/120 is a medical emergency. This is not true. The American Heart Association terms a pressure of 180/120 as a hypertensive urgency that does not require an emergency room visit. As an ER physician, I see patients on a regular basis who come in solely because their blood pressure is high. After a discussion about high blood pressure, I send them to see their regular doctor. Very little is accomplished in the ER, and Medicare will pay hundreds of dollars or more for the visit.
—Karl Treffinger,
Queen Creek, AZ

EDITOR'S NOTE *The American Heart Association says that if you get two consecutive readings of 180/120 at home, you should contact your doctor immediately. But you're correct that the AHA advises that these numbers* *warrant a trip to the ER only if those readings are accompanied by other symptoms, such as chest pain and shortness of breath. We regret that there wasn't room to explain these nuances within the short chart in the article, and thank you for the clarification.*

BLOOD PRESSURE measurement could be much more efficient and accurate. Swiss engineers have developed an armband that monitors blood pressure continuously without applying pressure and sends the results to your smartphone. This has been approved in Europe, but the Food and Drug Administration has not approved it, so it can't be sold in the U.S.
–Klaus M. Schroeder, Kerrville, TX

EDITOR'S NOTE *It's true that more cuffless technologies are being developed. But experts tell CR that these aren't quite ready for prime time. One big problem: Many of these devices are based on the same optical sensing technology behind pulse oximetry, which we now know tends to be less accurate in people with darker skin tones.*

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO my doctor told me my BP of 135/80 was "perfect." Since then, guidelines for what qualifies as hypertension have been creeping downward, some say at the behest of pharmaceutical companies. The chart in your article says normal BP is less than 120/80. Does this advice come from a consensus of doctors?
– S. Shuster, North Scituate, RI

EDITOR'S NOTE *No expert groups would suggest someone with a blood pressure of 120/80 (or slightly higher) should take medication to lower it. Our definition of high blood pressure comes from 2017 guidelines developed by the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology, and these guidelines for defining hypertension have been adopted by groups like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Still, not all experts agree on when medication should be used to lower blood pressure. For example, guidelines from the American College of Physicians and the American Academy of Family Physicians aimed specifically at adults ages 60 and older recommend taking blood pressure drugs only when the systolic pressure is 150 mmHg or above, or 140 mmHg or above for those with a history of stroke.*

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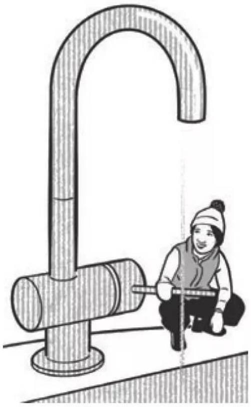
CHOOSING OLIVE OIL

I WAS VERY EXCITED to read "How to Choose a Good Olive Oil." But you didn't mention first cold pressed olive oil, which has, by far, a deeper, more robust flavor.
–Lisa Marino, Allegheny, PA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Extra virgin olive oil is by definition first cold pressed, whether the label says so or not. According to standards set by the International Olive Council, extra virgin olive oil can't be produced with heat or chemicals. The term "cold pressed" is a holdover from the days when olives were actually "pressed" to extract the oil. Today the extraction is done in a centrifuge machine.*



WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO KEEP PIPES FROM FREEZING?

In "Prevent Frozen Pipes This Winter," you suggested letting the cold water drip on frigid days and nights to prevent water in the pipe from freezing. What about the hot water pipe?
—William J. Stein, Mahopac, NY

EDITOR'S NOTE *It's a good idea to let the hot water drip, too. If you have separate hot and cold faucet handles, leave both dripping slightly. If you have one lever, leave it in the middle to drip on "warm." As we mentioned in the article, pipes on an outside wall are more prone to freezing than pipes that are on interior walls.*

PET INSURANCE SOLUTIONS

REGARDING "Should You Get Pet Insurance?": When researching auto insurance, I found that Progressive [auto insurance] will cover vet bills if your pet is injured in a car accident. This could be a good option for those who travel with their pet.
–Emily Drive, via CR.org

EDITOR'S NOTE *Yes, Progressive auto insurance policyholders with collision coverage can have up to $1,000 of vet bills covered if their pet is injured in a crash while riding in the insured car. Progressive isn't the only insurer to offer coverage; ask your insurance agent if pet benefits are part of your collision coverage.*

CORRECTION
"How to Eat Less Plastic," in the February 2024 issue, incorrectly identified one of the products. It should have been Brisk Iced Tea lemon (can), not Lipton Brisk Lemonade (can).

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs …

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Dishwashers

WE TESTED: 94 models
WE TEST FOR: How thoroughly it cleans dishes with baked-on food and dries plastic items, its energy use, noise level, cycle time, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 63
Range: 45-81

TOP PICK & QUIETEST
✓ **Bosch Benchmark SHP9PCM5N (24-inch)**
$1,800

81
OVERALL SCORE

EXCELLENT CLEANING RESULTS FOR LESS
✓ **LG LDFC2423V (24-inch)**
$500

73
OVERALL SCORE

FITS NARROW SPACES
✓ **Whirlpool WDF518SAHM (18-inch)**
$960

70
OVERALL SCORE

Dishwasher Detergent

WE TESTED: 23 products
WE TEST FOR: How well a detergent removes baked-on food from glass dishes and resists water spots on glassware.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 75
Range: 47-92

FIGHTS GRIME & RESISTS WATER SPOTS
✓ **Member's Mark (Sam's Club) Ultimate Clean Dishwasher Pacs**
10¢ per load

92
OVERALL SCORE

GREAT CLEANER BUT PRICEY
✓ **Cascade Action Pacs with Dawn**
22¢ per load

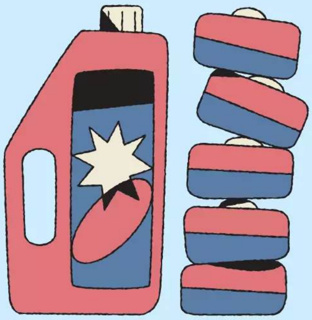
89
OVERALL SCORE

MONEY-SAVER
✓ **Great Value Dishwasher Gel (Walmart)**
5¢ per load

74
OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

Do individual dishwasher pacs clean better than bottled gels?



OUR TESTS HAVE consistently found that bottled gel detergents don't match the cleaning power of today's top-rated detergent pacs (also called packets, tabs, or tablets). In general, pacs do a better job because they contain more additives, including degreasers, bleach, and rinse aids, so they're able to remove baked-on food and resist water spots on glassware. Combine that with the convenience of popping a premeasured pac into your dishwasher and it's no surprise they've become the most widely sold type of dish detergent on the market. But bottled gels are less expensive than pacs, costing as little as 5 cents per load, a bargain compared with the Cascade pacs above.

ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org.**

Carry-On Luggage

WE TESTED: 9 models
WE TEST FOR: The ease of opening and closing the bag as well as using its telescopic handle, its impact resistance, the quality of construction, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 68
Range: 61-80

BEST OVERALL
✓ Samsonite Outline Pro Carry-On Spinner
$170

80 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE
$ Amazon Basics 21-Inch Hardside Spinner
$70

78 OVERALL SCORE

LIMITED LIFETIME WARRANTY
Away The Carry On
$275

67 OVERALL SCORE

Interior Paints

WE TESTED: 19 products
WE TEST FOR: How well it hides black paint with just one coat and resists tough oil- and water-based stains.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 70
Range: 46-99

NEAR-PERFECT BUT PRICEY
✓ Behr Dynasty (Home Depot)
$59

99 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD VALUE
✓ Magnolia Home by Joanna Gaines Premium Interior
$47

88 OVERALL SCORE

ZERO VOCs*
HGTV Home by Sherwin-Williams Ovation Plus (Lowe's)
$42

70 OVERALL SCORE

Mirrorless Cameras

WE TESTED: 48 models
WE TEST FOR: Image quality in regular low light and flash conditions, video quality, image stabilization, quality of the viewfinder, battery life, ease of use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 83
Range: 71-92

BEST UNDER $1,000
✓ Canon EOS R10 w/18-45mm IS STM
$870

85 OVERALL SCORE

SUPERIOR VIDEO QUALITY
✓ Nikon Z 50 w/16-50mm
$897

83 OVERALL SCORE

BUDGET-FRIENDLY
✓ Panasonic Lumix DMC-G7K w/14-42mm
$498

80 OVERALL SCORE

Electric Chainsaws

WE TESTED: 60 models
WE TEST FOR: How easy a chainsaw is to start, how fast it cuts through a 10-inch-square oak beam, how safe it is, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 70
Range: 34-82

EASY TO USE (BATTERY-POWERED)
✓ Ego CS1804
$380

82 OVERALL SCORE

SPEEDY CUTTING (BATTERY-POWERED)
$ Cat DG630
$280

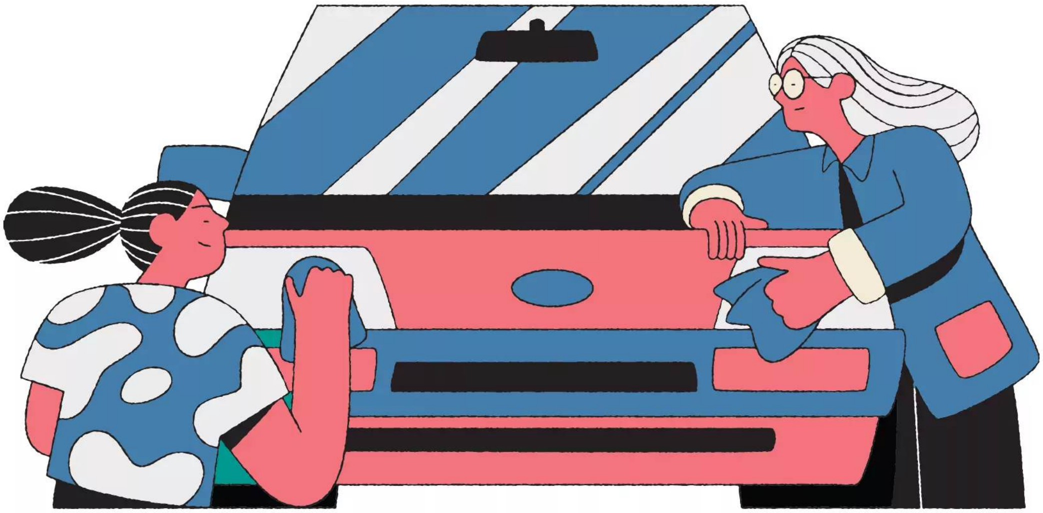
82 OVERALL SCORE

BARGAIN BUY (CORDED)
$ Oregon 603352
$98

67 OVERALL SCORE

*CR doesn't test VOC claims.
Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Lawn Mowers & More



My car's headlights look cloudy. Is this a problem?

OVER TIME, car headlights can go from crystal clear to cloudy. "The yellow haze you see on headlights as they age happens when the polycarbonate coating on the lenses deteriorates, which can take place more quickly in locales where cars get a lot of sun," says Jennifer Stockburger, director of operations at CR's Auto Test Center. This is a safety issue because haze limits how much light is projected out onto the road. The good news is that you can often remove the haziness by using a headlight restoration kit, which can cost as little as $10 for a basic one. (New headlight housings can cost hundreds of dollars.) With these DIY kits, you sand down the damaged lens coating, then apply a protective sealant. When we last tested a few of these kits, we found that all of them significantly improved light output. "The kits absolutely work, and you can do the job in your garage or driveway," Stockburger says. "You'll see much better at night after using one." If you're not comfortable sanding down the headlights yourself, repair shops provide this service for $100 to $150, depending on the car model and headlight condition. But whether you use a kit or go to a pro, it won't be a long-term fix. The haze will come back in about a year, so you'll probably need to restore your headlights annually.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at **CR.org/askourexperts** ... and watch for the answers.

What should I do if I find an error on my credit report?

ERRORS ON CREDIT REPORTS are more common than you might think. In a 2021 CR analysis, around one-third of participants found a mistake on their report. And it can be serious enough to cause you to be denied credit or to pay more for credit. Here's what you can do to remedy an error: First, file a dispute with each of the three major credit bureaus—Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. Standardized online forms provided by the credit bureaus can oversimplify your dispute by requiring you to choose among predetermined check boxes, so we suggest sending any supporting materials, including account statements or payment records you may have, by certified mail. (Remember to keep copies for yourself.) Credit bureaus have five days to get the disputed information to the financial institution or debt collector that supplied it. If the company doesn't investigate and respond to the dispute, the credit bureaus are legally required to delete the information. And you should learn the result from them within 30 days of filing.

If that doesn't work, submit a complaint to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau explaining the error and lack of resolution. Include important dates, amounts, and communication with the credit bureaus and attach supporting documentation. If you lose your case, consider working with an experienced attorney. You can sue a credit bureau or financial institution for credit report errors.

What's the best way to keep an open bottle of wine from going bad?

WHEN YOU LEAVE a bottle open with leftover wine inside, the oxygen in the air converts the alcohol to a different chemical, which is what gives old, opened wine that vinegary taste. Wedging the original cork back into the bottle can help slow the oxidation of your wine, but according to wine experts, there are more effective ways to keep it tasting fresher longer.

One of the best low-cost options that wine experts recommended to us is a disposable bottle stopper called the Repour Wine Saver ($10 for four), which is made with iron (and other materials) to help soak up the oxygen in the bottle like a sponge. Repour claims it will keep wine fresh for up to two months. Another solution is a vacuum pump stopper, such as the Vacu Vin wine saver pump ($17). This works by pumping out oxygen from inside the bottle while keeping outside air from getting in. The manufacturer claims it will keep wines fresh for up to 10 days. But if a standard cork or wine stopper is all you have handy, cork the bottle and then pop it in the fridge. Keeping it cold will help preserve the wine better than if you leave it out at room temperature.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH CARRINGTON

CR Insights

PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRACTICAL ADVICE

IN THE KNOW

Coffee Makers With Big Benefits

COMBINATION MACHINES that brew both coffee and espresso are not exactly new. But now these multifunction coffee makers are common, and have even more skills. The Ninja Barista System, shown here, can brew a pot of drip coffee from grounds or a single cup from a pod, and has a built-in milk frother, too. All these bells and whistles don't need to cost a lot: Many of these machines are less than $200 and also perform well in our brew tests.

DO-IT-ALL BREWER

Ninja Espresso & Coffee Barista System $200

Takes Nespresso-style pods or loose grounds. It makes drip, espresso, cappuccino, latte, and iced coffees. It also has a foldaway milk frother arm.

73 OVERALL SCORE

PETITE (BUT PRICEY) SPECIALTY POD MACHINE

✓ Nespresso CitiZ EN267BAE $330

Takes pods for single-serve Americano, espresso, cappuccino, and latte coffees. Includes a detachable milk frother carafe.

87 OVERALL SCORE

HOT OR COLD COFFEE FROM K-CUPS

✓ Keurig K-Cafe Smart $199

Makes single-serve hot or cold coffees in a variety of sizes: 2-, 4-, 6-, 8-, 10-, and 12-ounce cups. It has a built-in milk frother carafe.

82 OVERALL SCORE

BUDGET-FRIENDLY DUAL-BREWER

✓ Brim Triple Brew 12-cup 50017 $100

Makes hot coffee two ways: It uses K-Cups for single-serve cups or loose grounds for a 12-cup carafe.

76 OVERALL SCORE

PHOTOS, FROM TOP: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (1); MANUFACTURERS (3)

For our full ratings of over 100 brewers, go to CR.org/coffee-makers.

SAVVY SHOPPER

Save More on Your Groceries

Amount $40.50

Take a photo of what's in your pantry before you go

It's easy to forget what you already have at home and end up buying items you already have. Save yourself some money by snapping a quick photo of your pantry, spice rack, and/or fridge contents before you head out. That way, when you're in the supermarket and think, "Do we already have paprika?" you'll have the answer on your phone.

Compare store prices before deciding where to shop

An app called Basket Savings shows real-time grocery prices online and in-store at your nearby supermarkets (including Aldi, Costco, Kroger, Walmart, and more), allowing you to see ahead of time where the best deals are. Use the app to create your shopping list, and it will show you the prices for your items at a variety of stores near you.

Head to the frozen produce aisle

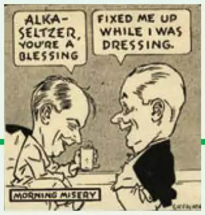
When you're looking for out-of-season fruits and veggies (like berries in the winter), you can often find lower prices if you buy frozen instead of fresh. Produce is typically flash-frozen at the height of ripeness, and there is no real nutritional difference between fresh and frozen. Plus, frozen lasts much longer: 10 to 18 months for optimal flavor and texture quality.

Swap nuts for seeds

Nuts can be pricey, but seeds like sunflower and pumpkin can satisfy your craving for a crunchy snack while supplying many of the same nutrients as nuts, at a lower price. At a Stop & Shop in New Haven, Conn., for instance, a 9.5-ounce tub of store-brand almonds cost $6.49 ($0.68 per ounce). The same-size container of sunflower seeds was $2.99 ($0.31 per ounce).

PHOTOS: LEVI BROWN/TRUNK ARCHIVE (RECEIPT); STEVE LUPTON/GETTY IMAGES (GREEN TEA); CONSUMER REPORTS (4); ICONS: RODRIGO DAMATI

CR Time Traveler GOOD-FOR-YOU DRINKS


ALKA-SELTZER, YOU'RE A BLESSING
FIXED ME UP WHILE I WAS DRESSING.
MORNING MISERY

1936 Alka-Seltzer, a carbonated drink, is actually "aspirin combined with effervescent salts," CR explains. The aspirin helps with headaches, while the effervescence helps with nausea.

1944 We evaluate teas and tell readers that green tea has small amounts of vitamin C and caffeine, which "gives a sense of well-being."

1951 CR warns that Bromo-Seltzer, a popular "headache relief" drink, contains dangerous ingredients that—if consumed regularly—could cause addiction and even death.

ORANGE
PINEAPPLE-ORANGE
PINEAPPLE-GRAPEFRUIT
FRUIT DRINKS

1962 Fruit drinks are popular but often contain added sugar. In our tests, none came close to the level of vitamin C that's in fresh, 100% orange juice.

1976 CR tests 10 chocolate milk drink mixes for how much calcium they contain, and a Ghirardelli cocoa wins hands-down (with 305 mg of calcium per serving).

CR MONEY SAVER™

How to Find (& Cancel) Unwanted Subscriptions

SUBSCRIPTION
CANCEL

TIRED OF PAYING for online subscriptions you no longer use but can't quite figure out how to cancel? You're not alone.

Streaming platforms like Netflix, cloud storage services like iCloud, and newspaper and music subscriptions often make it difficult to find the cancel function on their websites. It's also easy to simply forget about digital subscriptions you signed up for, especially ones started as free trials. Months can go by before you realize the provider is charging your credit card.

But it could soon be easier to end unwanted subscriptions. Last year, the Federal Trade Commission proposed a "click-to-cancel" provision that would require companies to let you cancel subscriptions as easily as you were able to sign up on a given website. In the meantime, we have tips to help you find and then hit "cancel" quickly now.

1 Identify your subscriptions

Check your credit card statements from the last year for recurring payments, says Tiffany Aliche, a financial educator and author. One easy way to do this: Use a subscription tracking tool, such as Rocket Money, or OneMain Trim, which find and then help you cancel subscriptions you no longer want. (Caveat: You may need to grant these tools limited access to your accounts, so read their privacy policies carefully.)

2 Opt out of apps

To see a list of the apps you're currently paying for through Apple Pay, open the App Store on your smartphone and click on "Account," then "Subscriptions." From there, you can click "cancel" on those you no longer want. (The steps are similar for the Google Play store.) For canceling other subscriptions, search Google for step-by-step instructions (e.g., "how to cancel a Netflix subscription").

3 Keep track of discounted or free trial periods

When you hit "cancel" on a subscription, it's common for services to offer you a "don't go!" free extension or discount for a limited amount of time. If you decide to take them up on it, set a calendar alert for two or three days before the end date of the promotion to remind you to take action. The same goes for any free trial subscriptions you may sign up for. Alerts will help you juggle multiple trials at a time.

ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS

1980 Bottled waters are being marketed with words like "natural," but CR's tests find that New York City tap water is just as safe and tastes better than bottled.

Consumer Reports
The selling of H₂O

THE JUICE CRAZE

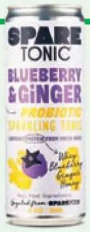
1992 Juicing has become popular, but CR explains that the process removes fiber from produce. Nevertheless, we recommend the Panasonic MJ-65PR juicer as a best buy ($80).

2010 CR advises looking for low-fat smoothies with no added sugar. Our healthiest, best-tasting choices: The Bolthouse Farms and Lifeway bottles shown here.

Bolthouse Farms
Lifeway
Lowfat Kefir
Probiotic

2017 We report that drinking coffee (less than 3 cups a day) could be good for you, lowering your risks of heart disease and some cancers.

2024 In our latest review of beverages, this fruit juice and whey blend is a source of natural probiotics, which are good for gut health.



Spare Food Probiotic Sparkling Tonic Blueberry & Ginger
$3.75

To read our most recent report on drinks that claim to be healthy for you, turn to page 38.

HEALTH UPDATE

Which Chocolate Treats Are Safe to Eat?

IN 2022, we tested 28 dark chocolate bars from popular brands like Ghirardelli, Hershey's, Hu, and Trader Joe's, and discovered that many contained worrisome amounts of lead and cadmium. These are heavy metals that, with frequent exposure, have been linked to immune system suppression, reproductive issues, kidney damage, and hypertension in adults, as well as brain damage in children. Of the bars we tested, we found the highest levels of lead in Hershey's Special Dark Mildly Sweet Chocolate, while Mast Organic Dark Chocolate (80% cocoa) had the lowest levels. We also reported that milk chocolate bars tend to be safer than dark chocolate ones because, in general, they contain fewer cocoa solids—the ingredient in which lead and cadmium concentrate.

We continued our testing in 2023, investigating whether other common chocolate products—including brownie mixes, cake mixes, hot chocolate mixes, chocolate chips, and cocoa powder (for baking)—contain high levels of those dangerous metals, too. A third of these newly tested products had concerning amounts of lead, which CR's experts define as 0.5 microgram or more per serving. None had concerning levels of cadmium.

The good news is you don't have to swear off eating chocolate. We found options with less problematic levels of lead in every category we tested. Here, the chocolate products that are safer to consume, as well as a few you might want to skip.

Our results indicate which products had comparatively higher levels and are not assessments of whether a product exceeds a legal standard. CR reached out to companies with products that had concerning levels of heavy metals. Hu and Nestlé told us that they stand by the safety of their products. Other companies did not respond.

CAKE MIX

SAFER CHOICES

🟩 **Great Value (Walmart)**
Devil's Food Chocolate Cake Mix
Servings per box: 10

🟩 **Pillsbury**
Devil's Food Premium Cake Mix
Servings per box: 10

COCOA POWDER

Serving size: 1 Tbsp.

SAFER CHOICES

🟩 **Navitas Organics**
Organic Cacao Powder

🟩 **Nestlé**
Toll House 100% Pure Cocoa

🟩 **BetterBody Foods**
Organic Cacao Powder

🟩 **365 Whole Foods Market**
Organic Cocoa Powder

SKIP THESE

🟥 **Hershey's**
Cocoa Natural Unsweetened 100% Cacao

🟥 **Droste**
Cocoa Powder

PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

BROWNIE MIX

SAFER CHOICES

🟩 **Betty Crocker**
Fudge Brownie Mix
Servings per box: 18

🟩 **Annie's**
Organic Double Chocolate Brownie Mix
Servings per box: 16

🟩 **Duncan Hines**
Dark Chocolate Fudge Brownie Mix
Servings per box: 20

🟩 **Miss Jones**
Brownie Double Chocolate Baking Mix
Servings per box: 16

🟩 **Betty Crocker**
Super Moist Triple Chocolate Fudge Cake Mix
Servings per box: 10

🟩 **Duncan Hines**
Devil's Food Cake Mix
Servings per box: 10

SKIP THESE

🟥 **Simple Mills**
Almond Flour Baking Mix-Chocolate Muffin & Cake
Servings per box: 12

🟥 **Bob's Red Mill**
Gluten Free Chocolate Cake Mix
Servings per box: 11

HOT CHOCOLATE

SAFER CHOICES

🟩 **Ghirardelli**
Premium Hot Cocoa Mix
Serving size: 3 Tbsp.

🟩 **Swiss Miss**
Milk Chocolate Flavor Hot Cocoa
Serving size: 1 envelope

SKIP THESE

🟥 **Nestlé**
Rich Milk Chocolate Flavor Hot Cocoa Mix
Serving size: 1 Tbsp.

🟥 **Trader Joe's**
Organic Hot Cocoa Mix
Serving size: 1 envelope

🟥 **Starbucks**
Hot Cocoa Classic
Serving size: 1 envelope

🟥 **Great Value (Walmart)**
Milk Chocolate Flavor Hot Cocoa Mix
Serving size: 3 Tbsp.

🟩 **Krusteaz**
Gluten Free Double Chocolate Brownie Mix
Servings per box: 16

SKIP THIS

🟥 **Ghirardelli**
Premium Brownie Mix Double Chocolate
Servings per box: 16

CHOCOLATE CHIPS

Serving size: 1 Tbsp.

SAFER CHOICES

🟩 **Ghirardelli**
Premium Baking Bittersweet Chocolate Chips 60% Cacao

🟩 **Nestlé**
Toll House Semi-Sweet Morsels

🟩 **365 Whole Foods Market**
Semi-Sweet Chocolate Baking Chips

🟩 **Lily's**
Semi-Sweet Style Baking Chips

🟩 **Kirkland Signature (Costco)**
Semi-Sweet Chocolate Chips

🟩 **Enjoy Life**
Semi-Sweet Mini Chips

🟩 **Great Value (Walmart)**
Mini Semi-Sweet Chocolate Chips

SKIP THESE

🟥 **Good & Gather (Target)**
Semi-Sweet Mini Chocolate Chips

🟥 **Hu**
Dark Chocolate Gems

To learn more about our testing of chocolate products, go to CR.org/chocolate-metals.

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Finding a Great Duvet

FLUFFIER THAN A BLANKET OR QUILT, and toastier, too, the best duvets–aka comforters–keep you feeling cozy but not sweaty. They do this with the right filling, shell, and stitching (see "The Best Duvets Have This ...," below).

To aid your search, our home editor, Tanya Christian, tested six popular king-size duvets for two weeks each. All of the duvets she tried have four corner loops for easy attachment to a cover (we tested only the duvets, no covers), and most were claimed to be hypoallergenic and machine-washable and -dryable. Christian took note of how uniformly fillings were distributed, how soft the shell material felt to the touch, how heavy or light the duvet felt, and each duvet's level of warmth and breathability.

EDITOR'S PICK

Buffy Cloud Comforter $235

FILL: recycled plastic
SHELL: 100% sateen weave Tencel lyocell

This duvet delivers on its cloudlike promise. The filling—upcycled from BPA-free plastic bottles!—is thick and fluffy. The Buffy didn't clump or shed (even when machine-washed), and it stayed at a consistently comfortable temperature every night, Christian says.

BEST ALL-SEASON

Quince Premium Down Alternative Comforter $150

FILL: hypoallergenic microfiber
SHELL: 100% cotton sateen

"I sleep hot, so I appreciate how lightweight and breathable this down comforter is," Christian says. Airy but substantial, the Quince's filling is evenly distributed and breathable, but also thin, so for some it may not be warm enough for cold winter nights.

A LUXURIOUS SPLURGE

Brooklinen Down Comforter $500

FILL: 80% duck-down cluster
SHELL: 100% cotton sateen

Brooklinen makes some of the best bed sheets CR has tested, and that quality can be found in this comforter as well. Despite its feather cluster filling, it didn't clump—and it offers sleepers warmth, breathability, and softness worthy of its high price.

FOR ALLERGY SUFFERERS

Clean Design Home x Martex Anti-Allergen Down Alternative Comforter $200

FILL: polyester
SHELL: 100% cotton

This comforter is very warm, and heavier than the others Christian tried—not great if you toss and turn. But with its micro-barrier fabric it may be good for those allergic to dust. At 94x108 inches, it's one of the larger duvets here.

A HEAVY DUVET FOR HOT SLEEPERS

West Elm Cooling Down (All-Season) $280

FILL: polyester
SHELL: 100% cotton

Made with a moisture-wicking polyester, this large duvet is nice for those who sweat under too-warm bedding. "It's toasty, but I never woke up overheated," Christian says. It's heavy and may inhibit movement, which some sleepers may not like.

BUDGET-FRIENDLY

Utopia Bedding Comforter Duvet Insert $38

FILL: polyester and microfiber
SHELL: polyester

This duvet is surprisingly sturdy, with a construction similar to higher-priced options. While it's not as fluffy as others, it's still decently warm. The main drawback is its polyester shell, which doesn't claim to be hypoallergenic and isn't as breathable as cotton.

THE BEST DUVETS HAVE THIS ...

FILLER MATERIAL: Down comforters tend to be lightweight and more breathable than down alternatives. Down alternatives, often made of synthetic materials, mimic down comforters but are usually hypoallergenic. Synthetics also trap heat. If you sleep hot, choose a natural fiber with moisture-wicking properties, like cotton or wool.

FILL POWER: Generally, the higher the number, the greater the insulating efficiency of a down comforter. We found the Brooklinen comforter above to be warm, with a fill power of 700.

SHELL MATERIAL: Shells made of natural fibers are more breathable than synthetics. And among synthetics, materials like microfiber and polyester are known to be sweat-wicking.

STITCHING: Common grid-stitch designs isolate filling into square boxes to help evenly distribute warmth. The more boxes, the more uniform the filling tends to be. Comforters without stitching are prone to shifting and clumping.

Shown: Quince European Linen Stripe Duvet Cover

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

2020 Honda CR-V Hybrid

HONDA CR-V HYBRID SUVs

Honda is recalling 106,030 2020-2022 CR-V Hybrid SUVs because a wiring issue could cause a short circuit or fire during a crash if the car's left front fender area is damaged.
What to do: Registered owners of all affected vehicles will be contacted by mail and asked to take their vehicle to an authorized Honda dealer, who will replace the battery cable. Owners who have already paid for these repairs may be eligible for reimbursement. Contact Honda at 888-234-2138 for details. The NHTSA campaign number for this recall is 23V844, and Honda's own code is FGB.

BLENDJET BLENDERS

BlendJet is recalling about 4.8 million BlendJet 2 portable blenders because they can overheat or catch fire, and the blender blades can break off, posing fire and laceration hazards. The blenders were sold at Costco, Target, Walmart, and other stores nationwide and online at blendjet.com from October 2020 through November 2023 for $50 to $75.
What to do: Stop using the blender, and contact BlendJet for instructions on how to receive a free replacement base unit. For details, contact BlendJet at 844-334-0562.

WET & FORGET XTREME REACH OUTDOOR STAIN REMOVER

Wet & Forget is recalling about 2.7 million 48-ounce and 68-ounce bottles of Wet & Forget "Xtreme Reach" Outdoor Rapid Application Moss, Mold, Mildew & Algae Stain Remover with Hose End Nozzle because the nozzle clip can dislodge and allow the cleaning solution to spray on users, posing a risk of skin and eye irritation, and other injuries. The bottles were sold at Ace Hardware, Costco, Home Depot, Lowe's, True Value, Walmart, and other home goods stores nationwide and online at Amazon, samsclub.com, walmart.com, and other websites from February 2018 through November 2023 for $30 to $35.
What to do: Stop using the stain remover. Contact Wet & Forget at 888-359-4623 or go to recallrtr.com/nozzle for details and to get a free replacement nozzle. Once replaced, the original nozzle should be discarded.

VORNADO STEAMFAST HOME & AWAY STEAM IRONS

Vornado is recalling about 1.75 million Steamfast Home & Away Travel Steam Irons because the power cord can become damaged near the cord bushing, which can lead to overheating of the cord, posing fire and burn hazards. In addition, this cord damage can result in exposed copper wires, posing a shock hazard. (About 275,000 steam irons manufactured before March 2017 were previously recalled in April 2023.) The recently recalled irons were sold at Bed Bath & Beyond, Walmart, and other stores nationwide and online at Amazon, steamfast.com, vornado.com, and other websites from January 2009 through September 2023 for $13 to $30.
What to do: Stop using the iron. Contact Vornado at 866-827-3362 or go to steamfast.com for details and to register for the recall and receive a refund or a free replacement iron.

POWERXL AIR FRYERS

Empower Brands is recalling about 319,000 PowerXL DUAF-10 and DUAF-005 Vortex Dual-Basket air fryers because the plastic U-channel connector used to optionally combine the two food baskets inside of the air fryers can break during use, posing a burn hazard. The air fryers were sold at Kohl's, Target, Walmart, and other stores nationwide and online at kohls.com, target.com, walmart.com, and other websites from August 2021 through October 2023 for $60 to $190.
What to do: Stop using the air fryer and go to powerxlproducts.com for details on how to get a full refund.

BUNKHOUSE AND LOTSA LITES MINI STRING LIGHTS

DM Merchandising is recalling about 34,600 Bunkhouse and Lotsa Lites connectable mini string lights because the bulbs can overheat when the lights are plugged directly into an outlet, presenting burn and fire hazards. The lights were sold at gift stores and boutiques nationwide and online from August 2023 through September 2023 for $10 to $13.
What to do: Unplug the lights. Call DM Merchandising at 800-548-6784 or go to 247dm.com for information about how to get a full refund.

MARCH IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

VACUUM CLEANERS

REPLACEMENT WINDOWS

STRING TRIMMERS

For more info, go to CR.org/buy.

PHOTOS, FACING PAGE: MANUFACTURERS. ICONS, THIS PAGE: RODRIGO DAMATI

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

The Best New Toaster Ovens From Our Tests

Today's toaster ovens are smarter and larger, and have a lot of skills: They air-fry, bake bread, and more. Here, how to find the right one for your countertop.

by Tanya Christian

✓ **Breville The Smart Oven Air Fryer Pro**
BOV900BSSUSC
$400

74
OVERALL SCORE

WHAT IF YOU COULD whip up a quiche, cook a week's worth of dinners, or bake treats for your next book club without turning on your oven? Toaster ovens have always made cooking easier, but the latest models are serious multitaskers, really streamlining your life in the kitchen.

"The vast majority of the toaster ovens we tested last year can change the way you interact with your standard oven," says Stacy Canova-Turner, CR's market analyst for small kitchen appliances.

Indeed, these next-gen models can stand in for your full-sized oven in almost every way—evenly roasting a pan of vegetables, broiling thin cuts of steak, baking chicken, and even turning out small sheet cakes or loaves of bread.

They offer other advantages as well. Toaster ovens heat up faster than a standard oven, trimming precious minutes off prep time. They typically reside on your countertop and thus require less bending (and make it easy to check on your food). And because the heat from a toaster oven mostly stays confined to the appliance itself, your kitchen won't get too hot, as it can with a standard oven.

Toaster ovens can even save you money: According to Energy Star, they're more efficient at cooking small to midsized meals than a conventional electric oven, potentially cutting energy use in half.

But all these bells and whistles come at a price. Toaster ovens under $50 are now few and far between. And the new, larger multitasking options will run you anywhere from $125 to upward of $500.

The Right Type for You

If you have a small kitchen or limited budget, or want a toaster oven only for basics like making toast and reheating leftover pizza, a smaller-capacity one will meet most of your needs.

These models can reheat last night's leftovers and help you warm up snacks. They're also proficient at baking and broiling small quantities of food. They make toast in a range of colors, though toasting bread can take longer than in a regular toaster (see "Do You Need a Pop-Up Toaster Too?" on page 20).

Traditional toaster ovens take up much less space than the new breed of multitaskers. Ranging in size from less than a cubic foot—about as big as a shoebox—to twice that, they're typically large enough to fit at least two slices of toast or a 2x6-inch baking dish. They usually have one rack, which means only a single dish will fit inside. And they generally don't have enough internal height to, say, roast a whole chicken or a head of cauliflower. That also means that the heating element is closer to the food, so they're not ideal for making baked goods that rise high in the oven.

If this is all you need in a toaster oven, one top pick is the Black+Decker Crisp 'N Bake TO1785SG (pictured below), which can be had at a decent price and offers stellar performance—among other strengths, it reaches an impressive 450° F—in a modest 9x16x11-inch (height by width by depth) frame. This dial-controlled model also has an air-fryer mode—a rarity at this price.

Who Should Go Premium?

Is most of your cooking for one or two people at a time (so you're not making large meals that require a full-sized oven)? If the answer is yes, consider a larger, more feature-laden toaster oven.

Size is a key consideration. If you're looking for a stand-in for your oven, says Lisa Keon, CR's senior technician who performs kitchen appliance testing, "go big or go home." That's because a model with an almost full-sized oven capacity (roughly 4,500 cubic inches or more) will enable you to cook a 12-inch pizza or an 8-pound chicken, and fit a 9x13-inch baking pan. Models with several rack positions let you cook two dishes at a time—a Cornish hen and a side of brussels sprouts, say—further increasing your toaster oven's usefulness.

You'll need to make sure your kitchen can accommodate one of these larger cookers, which require ample counter space and adequate clearance under your cabinets. (Picture a large microwave—and measure carefully.) The good news, says Kenneth Sutton, who performs kitchen appliance testing at CR, is that their large exterior dimensions generally translate into a lot of interior capacity—which isn't always the case with other countertop appliances, like air fryers.

To get the most from your new device, you'll also want one with functionality that matches your approach to cooking. Here are the most common options.

BASICS AND BEYOND

Some low-priced models offer next-gen features, such as air-frying.

Black+Decker Crisp 'N Bake TO1785SG $80

✓ **Hamilton Beach Sure-Crisp 31193** $120

PHOTO, FACING PAGE: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

▶ **Air frying:** Like a typical air fryer, these combo models use high heat and a convection fan to circulate hot air and "fry" food with little or no oil.

▶ **Steaming:** A steam function can bring that day-old bread back to life by using moisture to envelop the bread, lightly toasting its surface while keeping its inner moisture and flavor from escaping.

▶ **Convection:** This feature evenly distributes hot air inside the oven and removes extra moisture, producing flakier crusts, deeper flavors, and more tender meats, all in less time than conventional baking. (It's also what makes possible certain other features, such as air frying and dehydrating.)

▶ **Rotisserie:** A spit-and-fork assembly rotates food inside the oven while it roasts to perfection, for rotisserie chicken without the day-of trip to the supermarket.

▶ **Proofing:** The pandemic-inspired bread-baking craze has infiltrated the toaster oven market: Some models use a halogen light to create the perfect environment for activating yeast.

▶ **Slow cooking:** Soups, stews, and fall-off-the-bone meat get the low-and-slow treatment over the course of several hours. Choose from high and low slow-cook modes to accommodate your dish.

▶ **Dehydrating:** Use this feature to make your own dried fruit snacks.

▶ **Preprogrammed cook settings:** Some models have set-it-and-forget-it modes to simplify tasks such as baking cookies and achieving the perfect crust on a homemade pizza. Just keep in mind that these appliances have their limitations. For cookies, you're limited to a half-pan, so it's best for small batches. And you won't be able to accommodate a 16-inch pizza, but most store-bought frozen varieties will fit.

It's important to note that the toaster oven ratings, on page 23, don't reflect how well these special features work. The ratings are based on in-depth testing of the functions that all toaster ovens share—toasting, reheating, baking, and the like—as well as brand reliability and owner satisfaction data derived from our surveys of CR members who bought 40,690 toaster ovens between 2013 and 2021.

If premium sounds right for you, the 1,800-watt Breville The Smart Oven Air Fryer Pro BOV900BSSUSC is the crème de la crème of toaster ovens in our ratings. Its baking performance, eight rack positions, and broad temperature range of 80° F to 480° F help justify the $400 price, as do Breville's top-tier reliability and owner satisfaction scores. This model offers convection, dehydrating, and air-fryer functions.

The Emeril Power AirFryer 360 S-AFO-001, meanwhile, is a solid budget pick at around $170. It is superb at baking and aces our full-batch test, turning out four slices of golden brown toast quickly. It also delivers a temperature range of 120° F to 400° F, has six rack positions, and comes with a rotisserie kit that can fit up to a 6-pound bird. This 1,500-watt model has an air-fry basket for crisping up foods, and it offers additional preset functions, including dehydrate and slow cook.

Do You Need a Pop-Up Toaster Too?

TOASTER OVENS might be the hardest-working appliances in the kitchen—but for those who love a perfectly crisped slice of bread, the traditional pop-up-style toaster is still best. Our tests find that just a handful of toaster ovens excel when making perfectly browned toast.

And then there's the matter of timing: All the pop-up toasters we've evaluated crisp up two slices of bread in 90 seconds or less, while most of our top-rated toaster ovens take upward of 7 minutes to toast a slice. (The exceptions? The Ninja DCT401, Breville The Compact Smart Oven BOV650XL, and Panasonic FlashXpress NB-G110P, which all toast bread in roughly 4 minutes.)

Given those limitations, says CR test engineer Lisa Keon, toast lovers should consider purchasing a dedicated toaster.

These three highly rated pop-up models—the best ones for $40 or less—prove that you can get golden brown toast without breaking the bank.

✓ **Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 19039** $40

91 OVERALL SCORE

This top-performing model aces all our toast tests and (as its name suggests) is attractive to boot.

✓ **Cuisinart CPT-122 Compact Plastic 2-Slice** $30

85 OVERALL SCORE

It's slender enough for small kitchens yet powerful enough to handle frozen breads and bagels.

✓ **Hamilton Beach 22910 2-Slice** $25

84 OVERALL SCORE

This traditional-looking model is easy to use, toasts well, and is a cinch to clean.

The Best One for Your Kitchen

These are some of CR's top-rated models, from basic units to big multitaskers.

THE BASICS

Solid options for making toast and heating leftovers

✓ Cuisinart TOB-135N $180

A convection function helps this model warm food quickly and evenly.

68 OVERALL SCORE

Black+Decker Crisp 'N Bake TO1785SG $80

The temperature gets up to 450° F, and it can air-fry, which is rare at this price.

61 OVERALL SCORE

Hamilton Beach 31143 $65

Accommodates up to four slices of bread or a 9-inch-diameter pizza.

61 OVERALL SCORE

THE IN-BETWEENS

For a few extra features at a modest price

✓ Hamilton Beach Sure-Crisp 31193 $120

All the basics plus air frying and a rotisserie kit for well under $150.

67 OVERALL SCORE

✓ Breville The Compact Smart Oven BOV650XL $190

It looks compact, but it can fit a 12-inch pizza or half a dozen cookies.

66 OVERALL SCORE

Emeril Power AirFryer 360 S-AFO-001 $170

Fits a whole chicken and has a rotisserie attachment.

63 OVERALL SCORE

THE MULTITASKERS

Highly versatile stand-ins for your standard oven

✓ Breville The Smart Oven Air Fryer Pro BOV900BSSUSC $400

Dehydrate, air-fry, proof dough, slow cook, and more—this appliance does it all.

74 OVERALL SCORE

✓ Ninja DCT401 $250

Bakes and toasts with the best, but stands out for its versatile two-chamber design.

70 OVERALL SCORE

✓ Breville The Joule Oven Air Fryer Pro BOV950BST1BUS1 $550

Offers top-notch performance, 13 functions, and hands-free voice activation.

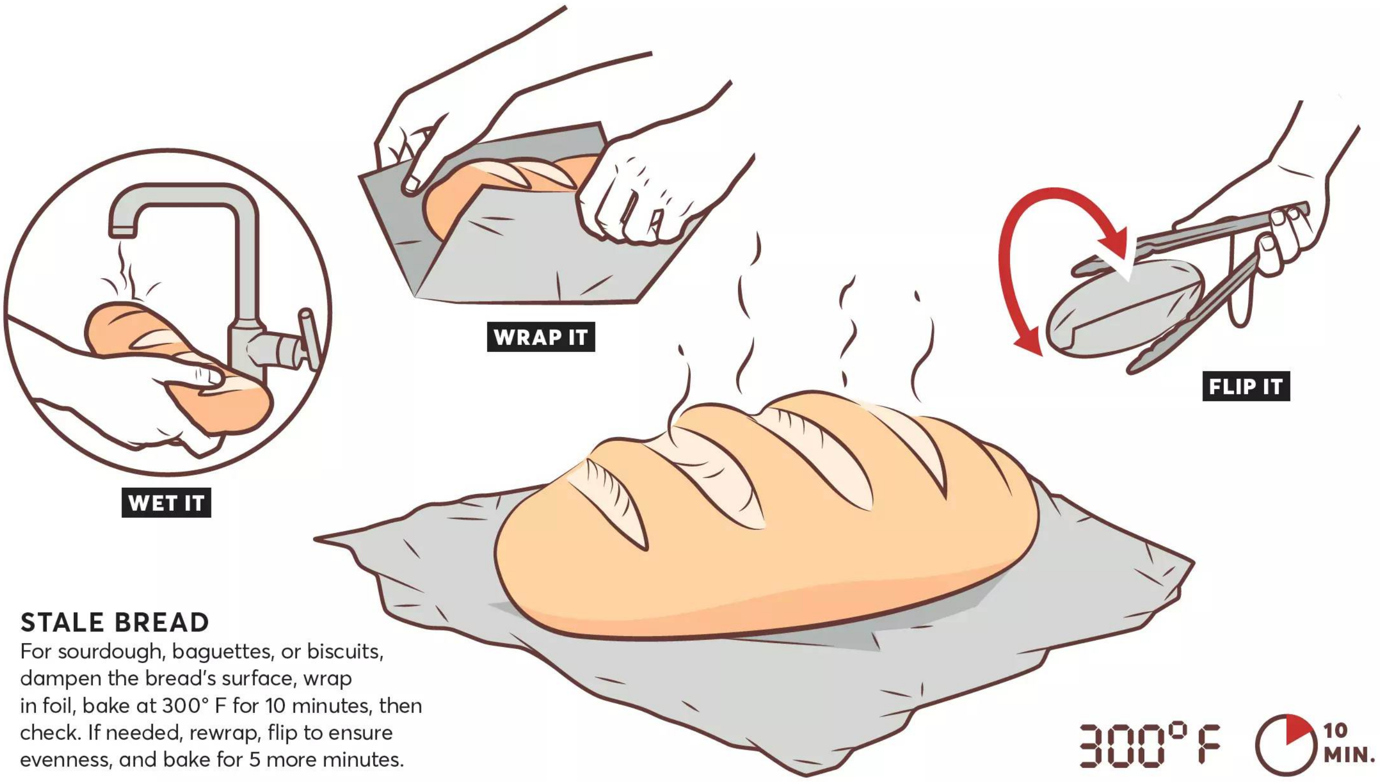
68 OVERALL SCORE

WORSE — BETTER

✓ CR RECOMMENDED

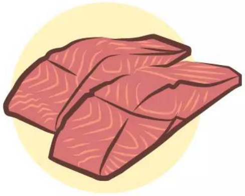
How to Reheat Leftovers

TOASTER OVENS might not be the quickest way to reheat food (microwaves are usually faster)—but they are better at warming evenly and preserving the quality of the original dish. (Microwaves can bring moisture to the surface and leave the food soggy or tough.) Here's how to use a toaster oven to make leftovers taste great.



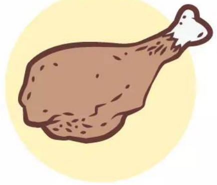
STALE BREAD

For sourdough, baguettes, or biscuits, dampen the bread's surface, wrap in foil, bake at 300° F for 10 minutes, then check. If needed, rewrap, flip to ensure evenness, and bake for 5 more minutes.



FISH

For flaky fish such as pollock or cod, place it on a lightly greased dish with sides, splash with water, tightly cover with aluminum foil, and bake at 275° F for 15 minutes or until the internal temperature reaches at least 145° F. For fatty fish like salmon or bluefish, skip the water. And to crisp up fried fish, use the convection or air-fry mode for 10 minutes at 375° F.



CHICKEN

For chicken without skin, place it in a pan or Pyrex dish, add a shallow pool of chicken broth or water, cover with a layer or two of foil, and bake at 375° F for 15 to 20 minutes or until warmed through to 165° F. For fried chicken, nuggets, or skin-on chicken, skip the liquid and use the convection or air-fry setting on 375° F for 12 to 15 minutes, flipping halfway through.

STEAK OR PORK CHOPS

First, bring the meat to room temperature, then place on a lined baking sheet and reheat for 5 to 10 minutes (depending on the thickness) at 375° F, flipping halfway through. Check for doneness and continue to cook until meat reaches your desired internal temperature. The Department of Agriculture recommends an internal temperature of at least 145° F.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY T.M. DETWILER

Ratings › **The Heat Is On** All of our top-rated toaster ovens excel at the basics, but some offer extra versatility, with multiple rack positions, convection heating, and room for a pizza, a chicken, or a loaf of bread.

	Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results								Features						
				Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Reheat	Baking	Color range	Toasting time	Full batch	One slice	Ease of cleaning	Ease of use	Large oven	Low oven height	Number of slices	Number of rack positions	Pizza size (in.)	Convection oven	Dimensions (HxWxD)
	TOASTER OVENS																			
✓	**Breville** The Smart Oven Air Fryer Pro BOV900BSSUSC	74	$400	⇈	⇈	↑	↑	↑	↓	⇈	⇈	↑	⇈	●		9	8	12	●	13x21x18
✓	**Breville** The Smart Oven BOV800XL	70	$270	⇈	⇈	↑	↑	↑	❘	↑	❘	↑	⇈			6	3	13	●	12x19x16
✓	**Ninja** DCT401	70	$250	–	–	❘	↑	⇈	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	●		6	3	NA	●	13x19x17
✓	**Cuisinart** TOB-135N	68	$180	↑	❘	❘	↑	↑	↑	⇈	❘	↑	⇈			4	3	12	●	10x18x16
✓	**Breville** The Joule Oven Air Fryer Pro BOV950BST1BUS1	68	$550	⇈	⇈	❘	❘	↑	↓	↑	❘	↑	⇈	●		9	8	13	●	13x21x17
✓	**Hamilton Beach** Sure-Crisp 31193	67	$120	↑	↓	❘	⇈	⇈	❘	⇈	⇈	↑	❘	●		6	3	12		12x18x14
✓	**Breville** The Compact Smart Oven BOV650XL	66	$190	⇈	⇈	↓	❘	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	↑		●	4	3	12		10x17x16
✓	**KitchenAid** KCO255BM	66	$280	↑	❘	❘	↑	⇈	↓	⇈	⇈	↑	⇈	●		6	3	12	●	14x18x20
✓	**Breville** The Smart Oven Air Fryer BOV860BSS1BUS1	65	$350	⇈	⇈	↑	❘	↑	❘	❘	↑	⇈	⇈			6	3	12	●	11x19x16
✓	**Panasonic** FlashXpress NB-G110P	65	$170	⇈	⇈	↑	❘	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	❘	↓		●	4	1	9		10x14x12
	KitchenAid KCO124BM	64	$220	↑	❘	↑	❘	⇈	❘	↑	↑	↑	⇈		●	6	2	NA	●	12x17x19
	DeLonghi Livenza EO241250M	64	$250	❘	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	⇈	↑	⇈			6	4	13	●	12x19x18
	Emeril Power AirFryer 360 S-AFO-001	63	$170	–	–	❘	↑	❘	↑	⇈	⇊	↑	⇈	●		4	6	12	●	11x19x15
	Cuisinart TOA-65	63	$300	↑	❘	↑	❘	↑	❘	↑	↑	↑	↑			6	2	12	●	14x16x16
	GE G9OAAASSPSS	63	$220	❘	↓	❘	↑	⇈	❘	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈			6	3	NA	●	14x17x17
	Breville The Mini Smart Oven BOV450XL	62	$160	⇈	⇈	↓	❘	⇈	⇈	⇈	❘	⇈	⇈		●	4	3	11		9x16x14
	Breville The Smart Oven Pro BOV845BSS	62	$280	⇈	⇈	❘	↑	↑	❘	❘	↓	↑	↑			6	3	13	●	11x19x16
	DeLonghi Livenza Compact EO141150M	62	$175	❘	↓	↑	❘	↑	❘	↑	↑	↑	↑			6	3	12	●	10x18x15
	Ninja Foodi XL Pro DT201	61	$300	–	–	↓	❘	⇈	❘	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	●		9	4	12	●	14x17x21
	Hamilton Beach 31143	61	$65	↑	↓	❘	↑	⇈	↑	❘	⇊	↑	⇈		●	4	2	9		8x15x12
	Black+Decker Crisp 'N Bake TO1785SG	61	$80	❘	↓	❘	↑	⇈	↑	↑	↓	⇈	❘		●	4	1	9		9x16x11
	Hamilton Beach 31225	61	$130	↑	↓	❘	↑	↓	↑	↓	⇈	↑	↑		●	4	2	9	●	13x18x16
	Calphalon Quartz Heat TSCLTRDG1	61	$290	⇈	❘	❘	❘	❘	↓	↑	❘	↑	⇈			6	2	12	●	12x19x15
	Cuisinart Chef's Convection TOB-260N1	60	$300	↑	❘	❘	↑	⇈	↓	↑	↑	↑	⇈	●		9	4	12	●	11x21x17
	KitchenAid KCO224BM	60	$300	↑	❘	❘	↑	↓	↓	⇈	↑	❘	⇈	●		6	3	NA	●	13x18x19
	GE Profile P9OIAAS6TBB	59	$450	❘	↓	❘	❘	⇈	↑	⇈	⇊	⇈	⇈			6	3	12	●	17x17x20

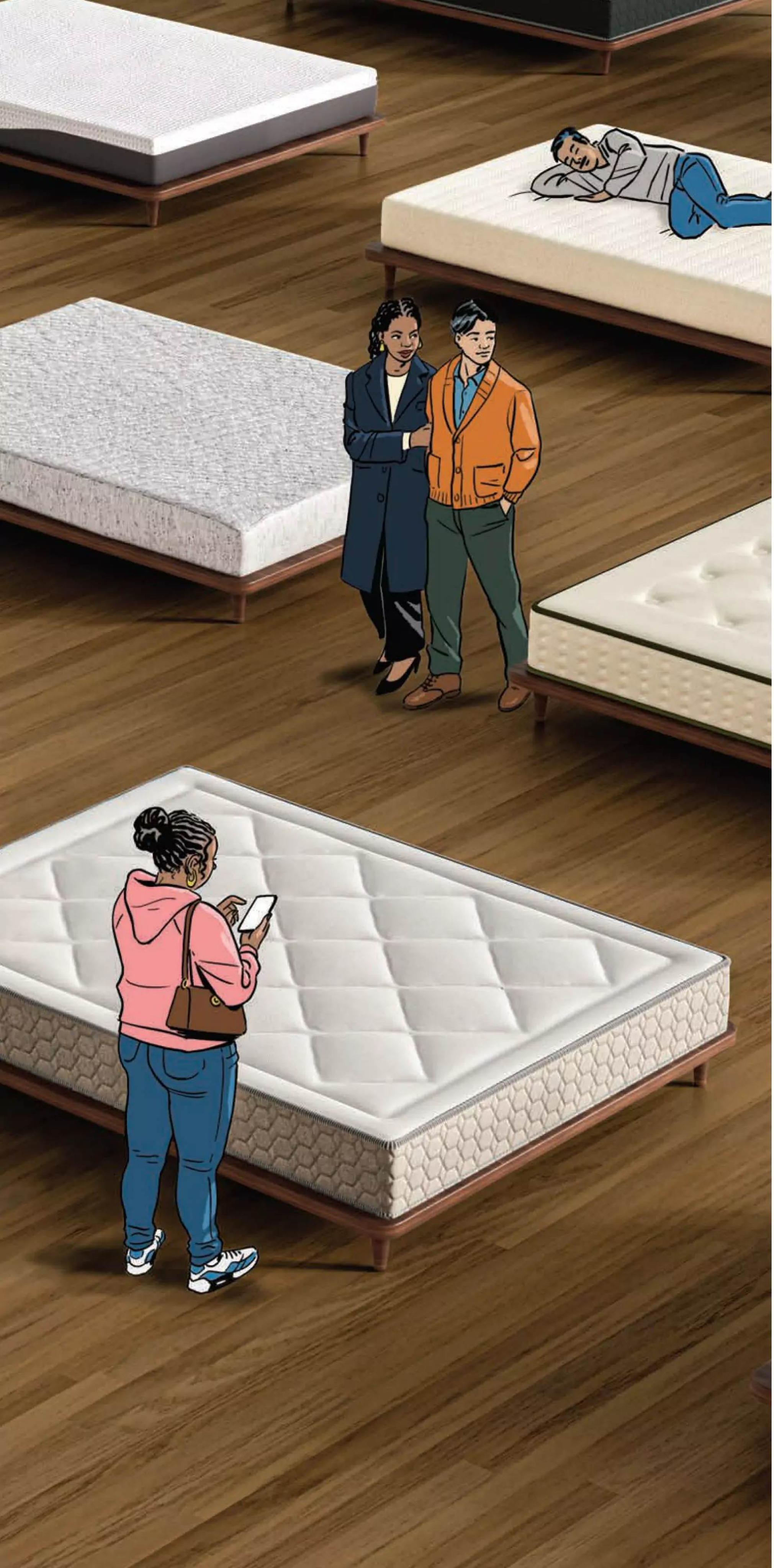
› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/toasters.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines performance test results with survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction.** When we have insufficient data to provide a brand-level rating, indicated by a gray dash (–), we give the model category-average scores. Our **reheat** test indicates how well the oven reheats lasagna. **Baking** reflects how evenly it bakes muffins and cookies. **Color range** measures how well it produces a range of very light to very dark toast. **Toasting time** reflects how long it takes to toast the maximum number of slices. **Full batch** reflects color evenness across a full batch. For the **one slice** test, we aim for medium-brown. **Ease of cleaning reflects** how easily a model traps food. **Ease of use** reflects how easily controls can be set and read.

⇊ ↓ ❘ ↑ ⇈
WORSE — BETTER

✓ CR RECOMMENDED

Find a Mattress You'll Love



Waking up tired and achy? Here's how to choose a bed that will lead to restful nights and brighter days.

BY JOANNE CHEN

I LOVE MY MATTRESS; really, I do. It cuddles my body without feeling like quicksand, and buoys me up without bouncing. And I can sit on the edge without sliding off.

Because I love my mattress (more details on it later), I also love my sleep—which should be every mattress shopper's goal. After all, a high-quality mattress helps you feel supported and cushioned, which, in turn, can help you wake up feeling refreshed and pain-free.

Chances are, you can love your mattress, too. The key is to know how to shop for one, from entering a store with confidence to walking out with complete certainty that you found a mattress that's a good price and that will last a long time. On these pages, I'll share the scoop—with advice from Chris Regan, CR's lead test engineer for mattresses, as well as bedding and sleep experts—on how to do just that.

Joanne Chen has spent the past five years covering the sleep industry and trying out more than 100 mattresses. She has been a deputy home editor at CR since 2022.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LISA SHEEHAN AND JACK RICHARDSON

Before You Go Shopping

Mattresses are a “blind” purchase: They look the same on the outside, while most of the true value is hidden on the inside. So it’s natural to feel unsure, especially given the high prices.

Fortunately, you can gain confidence by familiarizing yourself with the mattress landscape. To find your perfect match, spend half an hour or so researching at home and take your time trying mattresses in-store. “You’re not being fair to yourself if you spend less than that to make a decision on something you’re sleeping on for the next 10 years,” says Mike O’Donnell, a mattress salesperson who has worked at Charles P. Rogers, Mattress Firm, and Mattress Warehouse.

5 KEY FACTORS

Start by considering the following.

▶ **Surface feel:** How much do you like to sink into your mattress? A lot or not at all? These preferences are largely satisfied by mattress type: innerspring (including hybrids), foam, and adjustable air (see facing page).

▶ **Size:** Find the widest mattress that fits your budget and bedroom, so you can comfortably sprawl out. We test queen-size mattresses because they’re the most popular. But if you share your bed, consider a king. After all, the width of a king is the equivalent of that of two twins. Anything less than a king, and each half of a couple might be stuck with a space that’s narrower than what they slept on in a college dorm.

▶ **Thickness:** The standard is around 10 to 12 inches, though certain designs may be thinner or thicker. While the thicker mattress might look luxurious, know that budget models may be plumped up with fillers instead of high-quality materials, says Philip Carlitz, chief operating officer at Bedding Industries of America, which manufactures a range of widely sold brands. You might also need new (and pricier) sheets. Make sure the combined height of the mattress and box spring doesn’t make it too hard to get into and out of bed.

▶ **Firmness:** You won’t know whether a mattress’s firmness level is right for you until you try it. But in general, side sleepers tend to prefer a medium-soft to medium surface—the better to cushion their weight-bearing shoulder and hip, while enjoying good support. Back or stomach sleepers can get away with something firmer because their weight is evenly distributed. Back issues? Opt for medium-firm: According to a 2021 Journal of Orthopaedics and Traumatology review paper, this may help reduce back pain.

▶ **Cost:** A few hundred dollars can get you a basic queen mattress, providing adequate spinal support. But CR’s Regan says, “The sweet spot—a balance of good support along with nice pressure relief—is between $900 and $1,200." In my experience reporting on mattresses, I've found that if you want better-quality materials (a thicker cover, denser foam, and thicker coils and more of them), you'll often have to spend more—very generally speaking, closer to $1,500 to $2,500. Some of our top-rated models are in this range. Move up to $3,000 and beyond, and you'll find a larger array of mattresses, offering a wider range of bells and whistles, such as an organic cotton cover and natural latex foams.

MAKE YOUR LIST

Now that you have an idea of what you want, look at our ratings (on page 31). Focus on models with the best support for your size and sleep position (e.g., petite back sleeper or large side sleeper). They might not have the highest Overall Score, an average that favors those acing tests for all sleeper types. But all you need is a bed that performs well for your needs.

Next, check the firmness level. We've rated each mattress on a 1-to-10 scale, with 1 being the softest and 10 being the firmest. This way, you can compare mattresses across brands.

Sleep hot? See the "retains warmth" column. Do you wake up easily when a partner or pet moves around? Check the stability score, which reflects how well a mattress isolates motion.

Make a list of about six mattresses. See brand websites to learn about materials. (For instance, experts have told me that, generally speaking, lower-density memory foam may be more prone to body impressions than higher-density memory foam and that most good-quality mattresses have a memory-foam density of at least 3 pounds per cubic foot.) Also note pricing, warranties, and return policies, which can differ depending on where you buy. If you don't find the information you need, chat or call customer service.

THE RIGHT MATTRESS TYPE FOR YOU

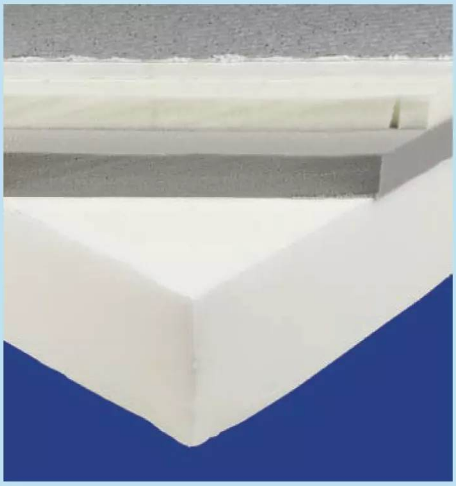
High-quality innerspring, foam, and adjustable air options can each balance excellent support with good pressure relief. The choice comes down to which feels most comfortable for you—so you can focus less on the mattress and enjoy better sleep.

Innerspring

These models combine coils with fabric padding or a bit of foam on top for a resilient feel. If you like nestling into a cuddlier surface, consider a pillow-top (which has an extra fabric or foam layer sewn on top of the cover) or a Eurotop (which places that layer below the cover). Want your mattress both resilient and squishy? Consider a hybrid (listed under innersprings in our ratings). While there's no official definition, **hybrids** tend to have substantially more foam than conventional innersprings.

Foam

Typically made with synthetic foams, these mattresses can range from, say, $200 Amazon-sold models often made from less-dense materials and prone to lumpiness, to pricey Tempur-Pedics, which conform to your every curve and are less likely to sag. If you have joint issues, rolling over in these beds may be a challenge, and edge support can be poor, especially with cheaper foams. We also test natural latex foams, which cradle the body while offering some springiness.



Adjustable Air

Brands such as Sleep Number (which doesn't appear in our ratings on page 33 because new models are being tested) and Saatva have an inflatable air chamber instead of a bottom layer of coils or support foam. The thicker the foam or fabric materials on top of that chamber, the plusher (and pricier) the bed. In some cases, you have the option of paying for one chamber on each side, so each partner can adjust it to their liking, with either a remote or a smartphone.

Where to Shop—and How

1.
CHOOSE A GOOD STORE

Loving your mattress depends on not just the company that made the mattress but also who sold it to you. After all, it's the retailer that guides you as you browse. Instead of hitting every showroom in your area, be picky. "The more you go to, the more confusing it might be," says David Binke, CEO at mattress brand King Koil.

Consider which type of store you'd like to shop in. In our 2023 mattress store survey, in which more than 6,000 CR members told us about their recent experiences, stores of all types received high scores in overall customer satisfaction. (See the top five stores from the survey at **CR.org/mattress-stores**.) But your best bed source depends on your situation.

If you're interested in a range of brands—or don't know which brands you're interested in—try a furniture and mattress store or a mattress retail chain, both of which sell a variety of popular brands. Mattress retail chains also often have good inventory, so they're a logical choice if you need to buy right away. The Original Mattress Factory was among the rare retailers in our survey to receive the topmost score for sales-help service and customer support, says Martin Lachter, who leads our survey research on mattresses and mattress stores.

For a more curated selection, you might consider independent mattress retailers, where it's not unusual for the owners to be on the sales floor helping customers. Some retailers also manufacture their own mattresses, so you're not paying a third party. That's why I chose to buy my mattress at Charles P. Rogers in New York City, where I found my innerspring, the Estate SE-GL. If you decide to go this route, ask how long it might take for delivery. Some manufacturer-retailers may make their beds to order, so there might be a wait.

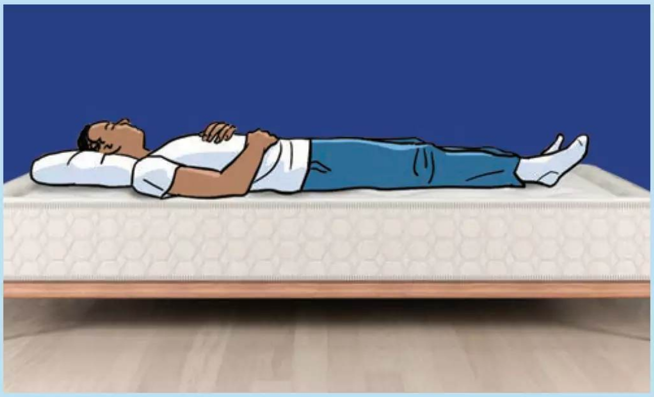
If a particular brand appeals to you, go to the branded store (such as a Saatva showroom or Casper Sleep Shop). That's your best place to have all your product questions answered and to try that brand's offerings. You'll often find the best return policies there too. Saatva rated particularly highly for sales-help service and customer support in our 2023 survey.

3.
ZERO IN ON SUPPORT AND PRESSURE RELIEF

Once you've narrowed down the options, figure out which mattresses will keep your spine aligned while cushioning your pressure points. To do this, ask for a pillow (the retailer should offer a disposable pillowcase) and spend at least 10 minutes on each contender, trying every position you sleep in. If salespeople hover, let them know you'll grab them if you have questions. Don't be shy—a good pro is trained to understand the importance of spending time on a mattress before buying, says Jody Putnam, chief retail officer at Mattress Firm. Instead, do the following:

Lie on Your Back

Your spine should feel comfortably neutral, with the lower back's natural curve supported, not strained, says Ahmed Radwan, PhD, a physical therapy professor at New York's Utica University. Do your hips, knees, and shoulders feel nicely cradled? They should.



Even if you choose a top retailer from CR's surveys, it's worth a quick scan of Google or Yelp reviews to get some insight on the best store and salesperson in your area. Johnnie Morrison, who has sold mattresses in Pennsylvania retail stores for decades, says happy customers often shout out helpful salespeople in their reviews. If a name comes up consistently, ask for that person when you get to the store.

2.

NARROW YOUR OPTIONS

Set yourself up for success at the store by wearing a comfortable top and pants; no dresses or skirts. Go in the morning (because any mattress can feel good when you're tired at the end of the day), and take your mattress list and sleep partner with you. If you're starting out with a list of six, you'll want to whittle that down to three or four favorites quickly. So take a minute in the store with each one you're considering. At this point you're simply figuring out whether you like the general feel: Is it fluffy, springy, soft, or firm enough for you? Does it seem substantial or flimsy? Do you sink in so much that you feel stuck? Or can you move about freely?

If your first impression is "meh," cross that mattress off your list. "That's why the showroom experience is invaluable," says Linda Klein, president of Charles P. Rogers. If you don't love it there, you're unlikely to love it at home.

Try the bed with your partner and see how much tossing and turning (motion transfer) you can feel. Sit on the edge to make sure you don't slide off. If your partner or pet hoards space, try lying on the perimeter too.

Good materials tend to be neatly tailored; a foam model's covering shouldn't sag or feel thin. "A quality manufacturer won't display a sample with skipped stitching, uneven piping, or dents on the side," says Carlitz at Bedding Industries of America.

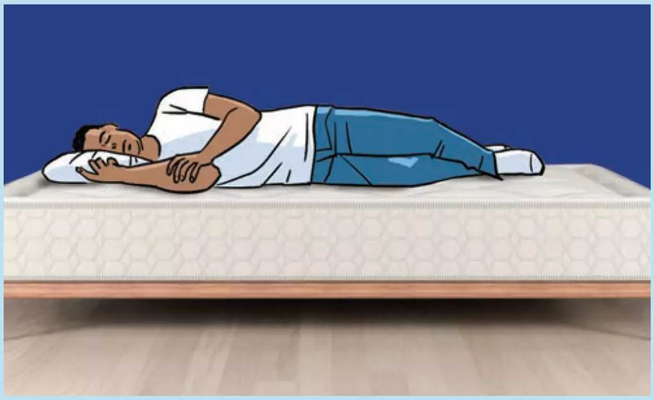
Note the three or four mattresses that appeal the most to you. You'll revisit them in step 3, below.

Buying a Mattress Online

It's always better to buy in person, and many web-based brands now have showrooms or partner walk-in retailers. But if you live far away, or you don't have time, buying online—without trying the mattress at all—may be the only way to go. Fortunately, online brands tend to have the most generous trial periods, ranging from a month to a year, and, in many cases, promise a full refund if you're not satisfied. Still, returns are a hassle, and while many brands say they'll recycle or donate the mattress, that's not always possible—and it ends up in a landfill. To avoid all this, explore the mattresses-in-a-box, as marked in our ratings (starting on page 31). Many of these models come from companies that received excellent or very good scores in our 2023 mattress store survey for attributes such as service and web support. Members purchasing a mattress on Amazon were also generally satisfied.

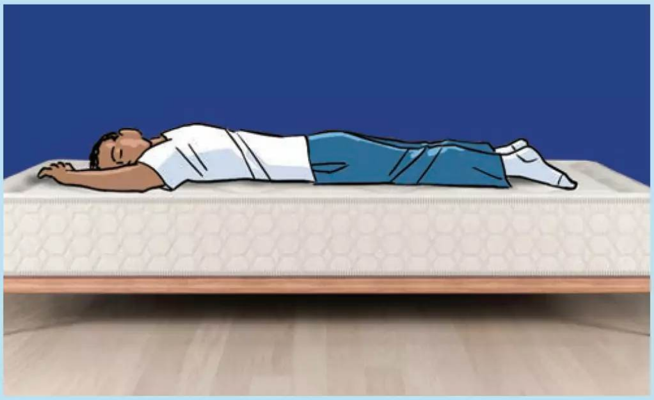
Turn to Each Side

With the proper pillow filling the space between your head and shoulders, your neck and spine should feel comfortably aligned, not twisted or flexed. Your shoulders and hips should feel cushioned, not compressed.



Lie on Your Stomach (if You Must)

Radwan advises avoiding sleeping on your stomach; it's bad for your neck. But if you can't help it, we think it's worth finding a mattress that minimizes harm. Skip the pillow. Make sure your spine isn't overarched and your belly and rib cage feel cushioned.



Making the Deal

According to an internal Mattress Firm survey, what worries people most when mattress shopping—in addition to making a poor choice—is overpaying. But recognizing a high-quality mattress and being familiar with what that costs (as noted in the previous pages) puts you in a better position to know whether you're getting a fair shake. Remember, too, it's okay to go home and think about it, and return when you're ready.

LANDING ON A FAIR PRICE

▶ ***Walk away from unhelpful salespeople.*** If they steer you toward a specific brand, they may be more focused on nabbing a larger commission than addressing your concerns. A helpful salesperson, says Putnam at Mattress Firm, "will ask you questions to understand your sleep needs and budget, then tie your answers to various products and various price points."

▶ ***Never buy a mattress that's not on sale.*** There is almost always a sale. The biggest events take place around Presidents Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, and Black Friday, but smaller sales happen throughout the year. Consider shopping at the end of the month too. Depending on pay structure, store managers may need to hit sales goals—and could be more open to a deal. (Sales staff may have a different pay structure.)

▶ ***Just ask for a better price.*** Our 2023 Mattress Stores Winter Survey shows that the median amount saved when haggling was $258. A third of those who haggled simply asked for a better price, and 61 percent of them received that.

▶ ***Mention that you saw a better deal elsewhere.*** If you found a cheaper price online or elsewhere, say so. Our survey found that 69 percent who tried this got the sale price matched.

▶ ***Say you'll shop around.*** Even if you haven't seen a better deal (or bothered to look), mentioning browsing at other stores may spark a price drop: Sixty-three percent of those who tried this tactic snagged a discount.

Do You Need These Add-Ons?

They might be offered free, or to entice you to pay extra. Here's when to say yes—or no.

MATTRESS ENCASEMENT
This is a must. Choose a six-sided waterproof one to help protect from dust, spills, and stains. It will also prevent mildew that forms from sweat, says Philippe Knaub, chief technology officer at foam manufacturer FXI.

BOX SPRING
If you're using a standard steel bed frame, you need a box spring to support the mattress. Otherwise, you can put your mattress directly on your platform or slatted frame, if that satisfies the condition of the warranty.

ADJUSTABLE FRAME
If it's free, it's often bare-bones. But you might want one that raises both your head and legs (for lower-back pressure relief). Independently moving sides (paired with a split mattress) can be helpful for raising a snoring partner's head.

MATTRESS TOPPER
This (in a twin size) is helpful if one partner prefers a softer feel than the other. It's also a fix for a new purchase that feels firmer than you expected. Contact customer service; they may send you one free or at a discount.

Ratings > **Rest Easy** For the right fit, pick your mattress type. Check test results for the sleep position and size that best describes you, then focus on models that show a dark or light green circle in that column.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results										Features			
			Comfort	Owner satisfaction	Petite side sleeper	Average side sleeper	Large/tall side sleeper	Petite back sleeper	Average back sleeper	Large/tall back sleeper	Durability	Stabilization	Firmness rating	Mattress-in-a-box	Latex foam	Retains warmth
INNERSPRING																	
✓ **Avocado** Green	84	$1,900	↑	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	I	7	●	●	
$ **Denver Mattress** Doctor's Choice Plush 🌿	82	$800	I	I	↑	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	I	3			
✓ **SleepFresh** Hybrid	82	$1,300	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	I	3	●		
✓ **Casper** Original Hybrid	82	$1,445	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	⇈	I	I	↑	⇈	↑	3	●		
✓ **Charles P. Rogers** Lifetime 8 Hybrid	81	$3,200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	↑	⇈	I	5	●	●	
✓ **Parachute** Eco Comfort	81	$2,400	–	–	↑	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	I	5	●		
✓ **Ethan Allen** EA Signature Platinum Plush	81	$3,420	↑	↑	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	↑	5		●	
✓ **Avocado** Green Mattress Pillowtop	79	$2,400	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	I	⇈	I	5	●	●	●
$ **Zoma** Hybrid	78	$800	–	–	↑	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	↑	⇈	↑	3	●		
$ **Beautyrest** BR-800 12″ Medium Firm	78	$770	I	I	↑	↑	I	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	↑	6			
✓ **Casper** Wave Hybrid 🌿	78	$2,300	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	I	⇈	I	2	●		
✓ **Big Fig** The Mattress for a Bigger Figure	77	$1,600	↑	↑	↑	I	I	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	↑	6	●	●	●
$ **Emma** CliMax Hybrid	77	$800	–	–	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	↑	↑	↑	4	●		
✓ **Tempur-Pedic** Cloud Medium Hybrid 🌿	76	$2,200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	I	3	●		
✓ **Charles P. Rogers** Real Bed	76	$1,200	↑	↑	↑	↑	I	↑	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	3		●	
✓ **Leesa** Legend Hybrid 🌿	76	$2,100	↑	↑	↑	I	I	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	3	●		
✓ **Leesa** Sapira Hybrid 🌿	76	$1,700	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	4	●		
✓ **Avocado** Eco Organic 🌿	76	$1,200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	4	●	●	
$ **Beautyrest** Silver BRS900-TSS Medium Firm Tight Top	76	$900	I	I	↑	↑	I	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	↑	4			
✓ **Awara** Natural Hybrid	75	$1,100	–	–	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	I	3	●	●	
✓ **Tuft & Needle** Nod Hybrid MAT-NODH-01-Q	75	$1,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	4	●		
✓ **Eco Terra** Hybrid Latex Medium	75	$1,050	–	–	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	I	3	●	●	
$ **Signature Design by Ashley** Chime 12″ Plush Hybrid	75	$330	–	–	↑	↑	I	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	3	●		
✓ **Helix Sleep** Dusk Luxe	75	$1,800	↑	↑	↑	↑	I	⇈	↑	I	⇈	↑	4	●		
✓ **Diamond** Intention Hybrid	75	$2,200	–	–	I	I	I	↑	↑	I	⇈	↑	2	●		
✓ **MLily** Mprove 3.0	75	$3,000	–	–	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	↑	I	⇈	↑	3	●		
✓ **Lull** Luxe Hybrid	75	$1,500	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	4	●		
✓ **Nolah** Natural 11″ 🌿	75	$1,200	–	–	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	I	4	●	●	
$ **Molblly** 12″	74	$300	–	–	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	I	⇈	↑	3	●		
✓ **Spindle** Organic Hybrid 🌿	74	$1,200	–	–	I	I	I	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	I	3	●	●	
✓ **Brooklyn Bedding** Titan for Plus Size Sleep 🌿	74	$1,000	↑	↑	↑	I	I	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	4	●		

⇊ ↓ I ↑ ⇈
WORSE — BETTER

✓ CR RECOMMENDED

$ CR SMART BUY

🌿 CR GREEN CHOICE

Ratings ›

	Brand + Model		Overall Score	Price	Survey Results: Comfort	Survey Results: Owner satisfaction	Test Results: Petite side sleeper	Test Results: Average side sleeper	Test Results: Large/tall side sleeper	Test Results: Petite back sleeper	Test Results: Average back sleeper	Test Results: Large/tall back sleeper	Test Results: Durability	Test Results: Stabilization	Features: Firmness rating	Features: Mattress-in-a-box	Features: Latex foam	Features: Retains warmth
	INNERSPRING *Continued*																	
✓	**Tuft & Needle** Hybrid With Pillow Top		74	$2,000	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🟡	4	●		●
✓	**My Green Mattress** Natural Escape	🌿	74	$1,800	–	–	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🟡	5	●	●	
✓	**Beautyrest** Black L-Class		74	$2,600	🟡	🟡	🟡	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	6			
✓	**Puffy** Lux Hybrid	🌿	74	$1,500	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🟡	⏫	🟡	1	●		●
✓	**Sealy** Posturepedic Plus Opportune II		74	$1,100	🟡	🟡	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	🟡	⏫	🟡	4			
✓	**Bedgear** M3 1.0 Medium Firm		74	$2,500	–	–	🔼	🔼	🟡	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	5	●		
$	**Allswell** Luxe Hybrid		74	$700	🟡	🟡	🔼	🔼	🟡	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	7	●		
✓	**Ethan Allen** EA Signature Firm		74	$2,300	🔼	🔼	🔼	🟡	🟡	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	6			
$	**Sealy** Posturepedic Summer Rose 12″ Medium		74	$500	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	6			
✓	**Serta** Perfect Sleeper Elite Trelleburg II 11.5″ Firm		73	$1,200	🟡	🟡	🔼	🟡	🟡	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	5			
✓	**Diamond** Transformation Hybrid		73	$3,000	–	–	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🟡	2	●		
✓	**Stearns & Foster** Estate 13.5″ Extra Firm		73	$2,400	🔼	🔼	🟡	🟡	🟡	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🟡	6			
✓	**Birch by Helix** Natural		73	$1,450	–	–	🔼	🔼	🟡	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	3	●	●	
✓	**Helix Sleep** Midnight Luxe		73	$1,900	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🟡	⏫	🟡	4	●		
✓	**Serta** iComfort CF 2000 12.5″ Hybrid Firm	🌿	73	$1,800	🟡	🟡	🔼	🔼	🟡	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	4			
✓	**Kingsdown** Passions Aspiration Pillow-Top		73	$1,200	🔼	🟡	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🟡	⏫	🟡	2			
✓	**Denver Mattress** Doctor's Choice Euro Top		73	$900	🟡	🟡	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🟡	🟡	🔼	⏫	3			
✓	**WinkBeds** The Plus		73	$1,700	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🟡	4	●	●	
✓	**Saatva** HD		73	$2,800	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🟡	⏫	🟡	2		●	●
	FOAM																	
✓	**Essentia** Stratami		81	$3,500	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	6	●	●	
$	**Earthfoam** Organic Medium	🌿	81	$1,000	–	–	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	7	●	●	
✓	**Casper** Original		81	$1,200	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	5	●		●
$	**Sleep on Latex** Pure Green Firm	🌿	80	$1,000	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	7	●	●	●
✓	**Avocado** Latex Mattress		79	$3,000	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	5	●	●	
✓	**Spindle** 10″ Organic Latex	🌿	79	$2,300	–	–	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	5	●	●	
✓	**Essentia** Classic REM5 Organic 8″		79	$4,200	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	🟡	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	3	●	●	
✓	**Tempur-Pedic** Cloud Medium		79	$2,000	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🟡	5	●		
✓	**Cocoon by Sealy** Chill Memory Foam		79	$1,200	–	–	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	5	●		
✓	**Reverie** Dream Supreme II Hybrid Sleep System Medium/Firm		78	$4,200	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	3		●	
✓	**Tuft & Needle** Mint		78	$1,800	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	3	●		

Brand + Model		Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results										Features			
				Comfort	Owner satisfaction	Petite side sleeper	Average side sleeper	Large/tall side sleeper	Petite back sleeper	Average back sleeper	Large/tall back sleeper	Durability	Stabilization	Firmness rating	Mattress-in-a-box	Latex foam	Retains warmth
FOAM *Continued*																		
✓	**BedInABox** Tranquillium	77	$1,200	ǀ	ǀ	↑	↑	ǀ	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	6	●		
$	**Molecule** Core	77	$800	–	–	↑	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	↑	↑	↑	8	●		
$	**Bedgear** S3 Performance	77	$800	–	–	↑	ǀ	ǀ	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	↑	5	●		●
$	**Lull** The Lull	76	$800	↑	↑	↑	↑	ǀ	⇈	⇈	↑	⇈	↑	5	●		
✓	**GhostBed** The GhostBed 🌿	76	$1,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	↑	7	●	●	
$	**Novaform** 10″ SoFresh Responsive Foam	76	$530	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	5	●		
✓	**GhostBed** Luxe	75	$1,500	↑	↑	↑	↑	ǀ	↑	↑	ǀ	⇈	↑	4	●		
✓	**Wright** 1.27 Memory Foam	75	$2,500	–	–	⇈	↑	↑	↑	↑	ǀ	⇈	↑	3	●		
✓	**Purple** Plus 🌿	75	$1,500	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	3	●		
$	**OleeSleep** Aquarius 10″	75	$420	–	–	↑	↑	↑	⇈	⇈	↑	↑	ǀ	5	●		●
✓	**Serta** SleepToGo	74	$800	ǀ	ǀ	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	ǀ	5	●		●
✓	**Saatva** Zenhaven Latex	74	$2,600	↑	↑	↑	ǀ	ǀ	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	ǀ	3		●	
✓	**Tuft & Needle** T&N Original Mattress 🌿	74	$1,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	ǀ	ǀ	⇈	↑	6	●		
✓	**Leesa** Studio by Leesa	74	$750	↑	↑	↑	ǀ	ǀ	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	↑	4	●		●
✓	**Luxi** The Luxi One	74	$1,000	–	–	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	ǀ	⇈	↑	2	●		
✓	**Serta** iComfort CF3000	73	$2,200	ǀ	ǀ	↑	ǀ	ǀ	⇈	⇈	↑	⇈	ǀ	4			
✓	**Tempur-Pedic** Tempur-ProAdapt Firm	73	$2,500	↑	↑	↑	ǀ	ǀ	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	ǀ	7			
✓	**Novaform** 14″ Serafina Pearl Cool Comfort Medium Gel Memory Foam	73	$780	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	ǀ	4	●		●
✓	**Purple** NewDay	73	$1,100	↑	↑	↑	ǀ	ǀ	⇈	⇈	⇈	↑	↑	6	●		
$	**Siena** Memory Foam	73	$600	–	–	↑	↑	ǀ	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	4	●		
✓	**Selectabed** Ultrabed Original	73	$800	–	–	ǀ	ǀ	ǀ	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	↑	7			
✓	**Novosbed** The Novosbed Memory Foam	73	$1,000	↑	↑	⇈	↑	ǀ	↑	↑	↑	⇈	ǀ	6	●		
✓	**Sealy Posturepedic** Plus Foam Albany Soft 13″	73	$1,650	↑	ǀ	↑	↑	ǀ	↑	↑	↑	⇈	ǀ	3			
ADJUSTABLE AIR																		
✓	**Saatva** Solaire	78	$3,300	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	⇈	↑	4		●	

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at **CR.org/mattresses**.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines test results with survey data for comfort and owner satisfaction. **Survey results** includes two brand-level ratings based on members' feedback on 65,845 mattresses purchased between 2013 and 2023. For the **comfort** score, members rated their mattresses with a 6-point ratings system from very poor to excellent. **Owner satisfaction** is based on a 6-point system from completely dissatisfied to completely satisfied. In cases without sufficient data, indicated by a gray dash (–), the model gets weighted category-average scores for comfort and satisfaction. **Side sleeper** reflects a mattress' ability to keep a side sleeper's spine horizontal. **Back sleeper** reflects an ability to maintain the natural curve of a back sleeper's spine. We used test dummies measuring 5 feet, 1 inch tall and 121 pounds for the petite sleeper scores; and almost 6 feet, 3 inches tall and 220 pounds for the large/tall sleeper scores. Average sleeper scores are an average of petite and large/tall scores. **Durability** gauges how well a mattress keeps its shape, height, firmness, and support after a simulated eight to 10 years of use. A high **stabilization** score means little or no vibration is transferred across the mattress. We rate **firmness** on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the softest and 10 being the firmest.

⇊ ↓ ǀ ↑ ⇈
WORSE — BETTER

✓ CR RECOMMENDED | $ CR SMART BUY | 🌿 CR GREEN CHOICE

GET YOUR PHONE, LAPTOP, WIFI FIXED—FAST

Repairing electronic devices can be frustrating, especially when you rely on them for everything from reading your daily news to texting with family. It's tough to figure out what's wrong and who can fix it. Our handy guide will help you overcome these hurdles, advising you on how to get the best service quickly—at home or in person—if you can't solve the problem on your own.

BY **JENNIFER COOK**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY **JOHN DEVOLLE**

Fixing Your Phone

While most phones are reliable—and surprisingly durable, considering how much we handle them—they can develop problems. Batteries fade over time, granting you less power per charge. And screens may break when you drop the device. But it's easy to find a repair shop with the tools and parts to fix those issues.

TRY THIS FIRST You've probably heard this advice before, but it's effective: If the phone simply stops working right, turn it off, wait a few minutes, and turn it on again. That clears memory, which can correct a lot of glitches. If the touchscreen has frozen and there's no way to turn the device off, follow these steps.

UNFREEZE AN IPHONE SCREEN: Press and release the volume up button, then the volume down button, and then press and hold the side button until the Apple logo appears onscreen.

UNFREEZE A SAMSUNG SCREEN: Press both the power and volume down buttons until the screen goes dark, then release.

GET ONLINE HELP *Tech companies are good at offering digital support on their websites (Apple Support, Google Support, etc.) and free companion apps. You can communicate with a trained technician via live chat (in a text-based window), find a repair store, get warranty information, and more. To expedite things, have your phone's model name, serial number, and password at the ready. The repair website iFixit also has helpful step-by-step info organized by device type; click on "Repair Guides."*

GET IN-PERSON HELP

Be prepared with your passwords and relevant warranty or service plan info for these options.

Apple Store's Genius Bar
Apple Stores provide great service for Apple products, but they get a lot of foot traffic, so it's best to book an appointment in advance. At Apple Support online, you can describe the problem, get a repair cost estimate, and select a time to go to a nearby Genius Bar. Or call 800-275-2273. Note: You may need your Apple ID.

Best Buy's Geek Squad
As an authorized service provider for Apple and Samsung, Best Buy provides parts and repairs at prices set by the manufacturer. Same-day repairs may be possible. Book an appointment online or call 800-433-5778.

uBreakiFix
uBreakiFix stores are authorized to repair Google and Samsung phones and out-of-warranty iPhones, and they fix Motorola and LG models, too. There's usually a one-hour turnaround. Book online or call 877-320-2237.

Local Repair Shops
A neighborhood business may offer faster turnaround times, but if it's not authorized by your phone's manufacturer, it might not have access to the diagnostic tools and parts required to complete the job. Right-to-repair advocates are working to address that, pushing for state and federal laws that grant access to those items, even for DIYers.

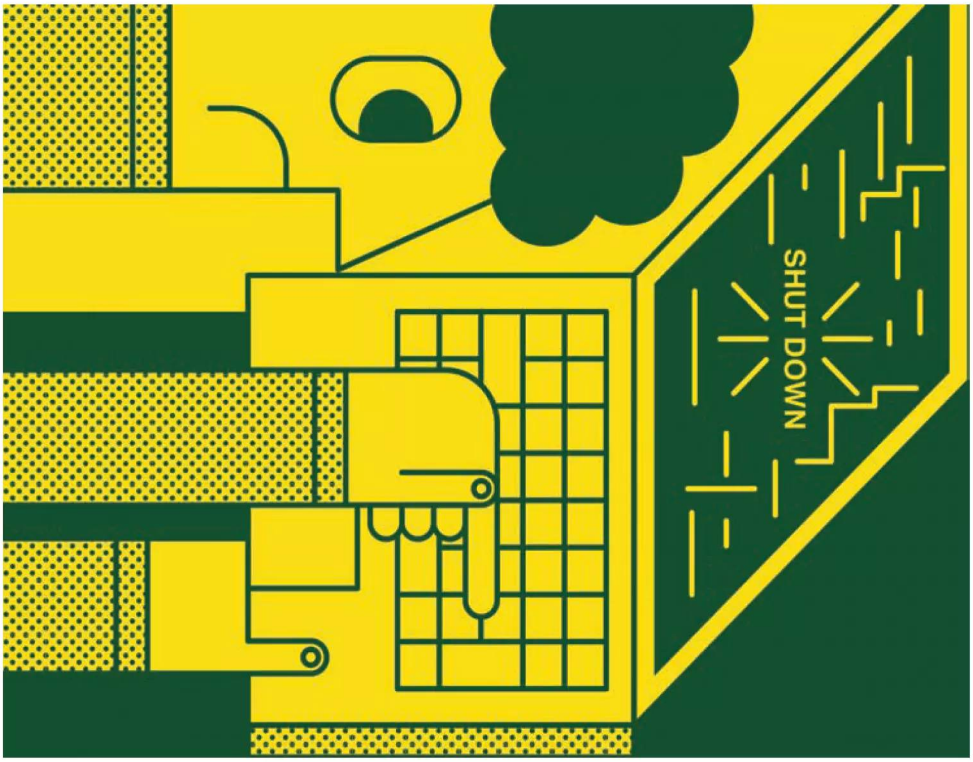
HOW EXTENDED WARRANTIES WORK

Should you pay $100 to $200 for "just in case" coverage? Here's how to weigh the cost and benefits.

Repairs: According to our surveys, most phone repairs cost less than the price of an extended warranty. That said, if you drop your $1,200 iPhone, you might be glad you paid upfront for AppleCare+ ($199 for two years when signing up for coverage, then $29 to fix a broken screen). Without that, you'll pay about $379.

Theft and loss: Apple, Samsung, and others charge $70 to $80 for protection you may not need. If you purchase a new device with a credit card, it might be eligible for 90 days of free damage and theft coverage. It may also be possible to repair or replace it using your homeowners policy.

24/7 IT support: This is a nice perk if you want unlimited assistance. Just note that you can get help by chat, phone, and even face-to-face consults without coverage, especially when the device is new.



Fixing Your Laptop

Some laptops are remarkably resilient. Others, not so much. But all succumb to wear and tear over time. Batteries decline, screens malfunction, keyboards fail (and shed their keys). Before calling for help, try to recall the sequence of odd behavior, says Elizabeth Chamberlain, director of sustainability for iFixit. Did the screen simply freeze or did it flicker for days, then start displaying phantom lines and bands of color? Details like those can lead you to a faster diagnosis.

TRY THIS FIRST: Turn the device off for a few minutes, then turn it on again. As with all tech, this simple reboot can solve lots of problems. If the laptop is frozen, you may have to force quit an unruly application. Here's how:

FORCE QUIT AN APP ON A WINDOWS LAPTOP: Press Ctrl + Shift + Esc, right click on the app to close, and hit End Task.

FORCE QUIT AN APP ON A MAC: Press Option + Command + Esc, select the app, and hit Force Quit.

GET IN-PERSON HELP

Apple's Genius Bar
Book an appointment and get cost estimates online or by phone at 800-275-2273.

Best Buy's Geek Squad
They can handle hardware and software problems, remove viruses and spyware, or recover data for $85 plus the cost of parts.

uBreakiFix
These stores fix laptops, PCs, and desktops at 716 locations nationwide. Find a store and sign up online at ubreakifix.com.

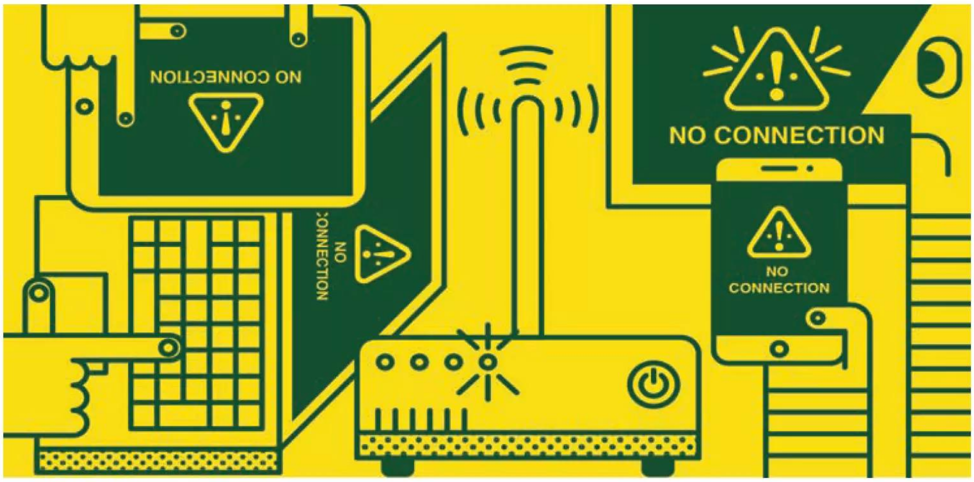
Local Repair Shops
Neighborhood shops may offer faster turnaround—if they have the tools and parts for the job.

GET ONLINE HELP *Start with the manufacturer's support site, where you can describe the problem and chat with a technician. Or search for your model/make and the symptom–for example, "Dell XPS black screen." Keep an eye out for forums where people, often experts, provide solutions. Or check out YouTube videos using terms like "Apple Support," "Windows 11," and "Dell Support."*

Fixing Your WiFi

Home WiFi networks, which give internet access to the devices in your house, are notoriously glitchy. They can stop working and then restart, or work fine in some spots but badly in others. The challenge: figuring out where the problem resides—with your device (phone, smart TV, laptop), WiFi setup (modem and/or router), or internet service provider (ISP). Before you start troubleshooting, keep in mind that it's best to place your router in the center of your home. Try not to hide it in a closet; that slows the signal. Metal, glass, brick, microwaves, and Bluetooth speakers can interfere, too.

TRY THIS FIRST Turn off your modem and router, wait a few minutes, then turn them back on. (Any service you call is going to ask you to try that, anyway.) Still not working? Go to your ISP's website to see if there's an outage in your area. If your WiFi is sluggish, use an Ethernet cable to connect the modem or router directly to a laptop. If that improves the speed to the laptop, the signal coming to your house is fine; you either need a new router or help adjusting the unit's settings.



GET IN-PERSON HELP

An ISP will send a technician to your home to restore service, replace a modem, etc., but it's not always easy to schedule those appointments. Here are other options for timely on-site help.

Best Buy's Geek Squad
If you're enrolled in the My Best Buy Total plan (see "How Extended Warranties Work" on the facing page), the Geek Squad will come to you to assist with troubleshooting, setups, and more. Cost: $50 for the first 90 minutes. Sign up at bestbuy.com.

Regional Repair Shops
If you live in one of the 18 states with NerdsToGo locations (nerdstogo.com), you may be in luck. This support and repair service can fix slow WiFi connections remotely by accessing your computer (with your permission). You can also post the problem on the online marketplace airtasker.com and get quotes and help from a local network troubleshooter.

GET ONLINE HELP *Google "Spectrum Support," "Xfinity Support," or the support for your own ISP to review your options. With Verizon, for example, you can communicate by phone, chat, or Facebook Messenger, and consult a drop-down menu for help with connection issues and identifying outages near you. A technician can walk you through a fix. If you're comfortable with following DIY steps, search online for "router problems" or "WiFi isn't working."*

YOUR TECH SUPPORT TOOLKIT

Want to stay cool when your devices let you down? Take a few minutes to prep for the next tech crisis before it begins. Here are three expert tips.

Have your info handy.
Create a file with your tech receipts, manuals, and troubleshooting guides. Add serial numbers, log-ins, and passwords. Photograph the setups for your computer and router, so you know which cables go where.

Update your software.
Device manufacturers use system updates to fix bugs and protect you from security threats, so don't skip installing them. Laptops and smartphones will generally prompt you to do so, but routers are less helpful. Today's models often have an automatic update feature that you can activate via a mobile app or the device's settings.

Back up your data.
If your laptop is lost or damaged, you'll be thankful that your photos and files are preserved. Stow them on an external hard drive ($70 to $100), get a free (or paid) cloud storage backup plan such as Google Drive, or do both.

ARE THESE ‘HEALTHY’ D

SPARE TONIC
BLUEBERRY & GINGER
PROBIOTIC SPARKLING TONIC
OLIPOP
Strawberry Vanilla
Naked
GREEN MACHINE
AURA BORA
GRAPEFRUIT ELDERFLOWER
RUBY
SPARKLING HIBISCUS
Blood Orange
ELEMENTS
FOCUS
poppi
Strawberry Lemon

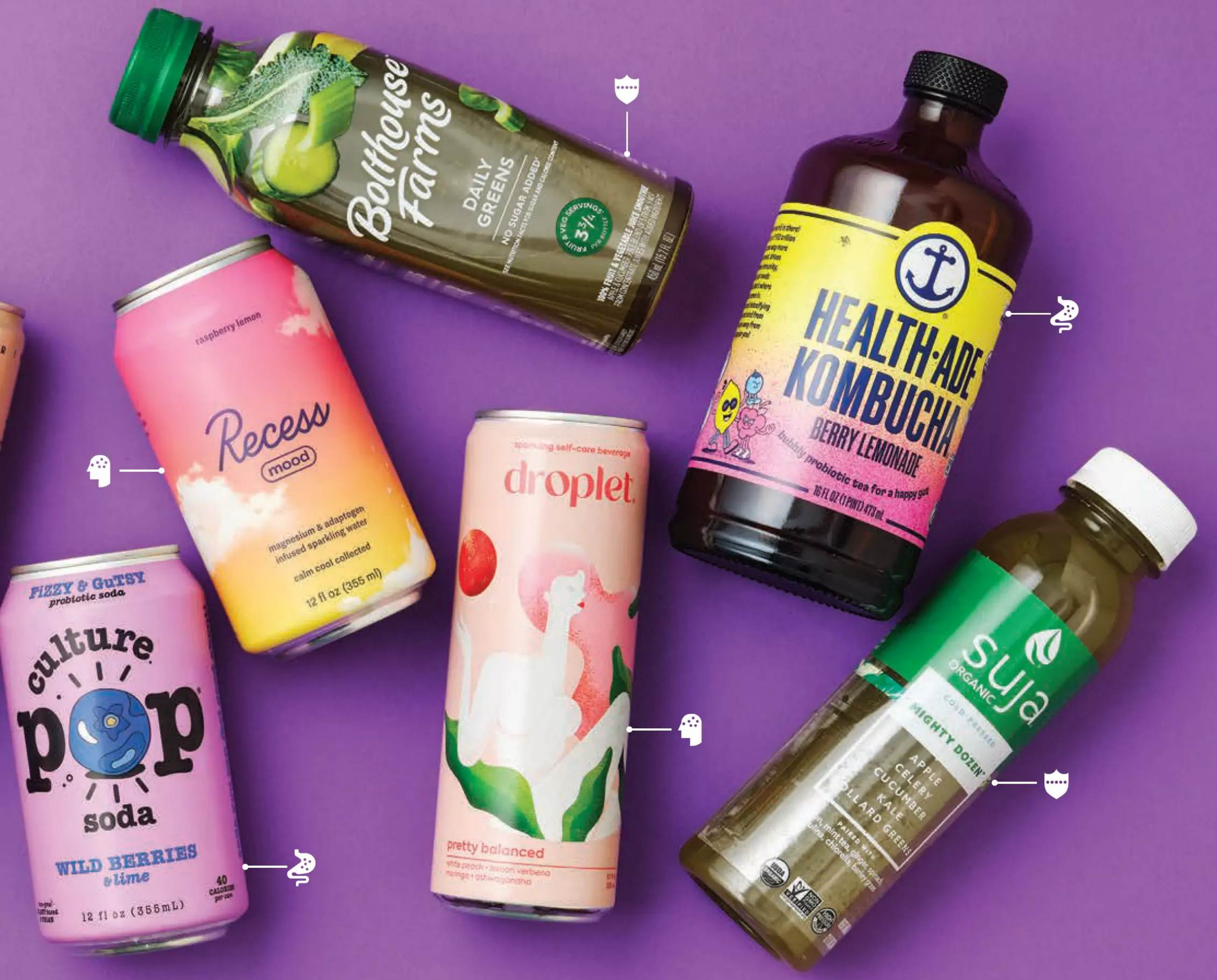
You’re walking past the beverage fridge at the store, and among the regular sodas, seltzers, and juices are drinks that are claimed to improve your health in all sorts of ways. This can mean easing stress, boosting immunity, or getting you energized or super-hydrated.

Functional beverages—as the drink industry likes to refer to them—often contain ingredients that were once found only in supplements or herbal teas: probiotics, prebiotics, hibiscus, ashwagandha, “medicinal” mushrooms, and more.

And they’re popular. These days, nearly 40 percent of adults seek out

RINKS GOOD FOR YOU?

We're talking about green juices, kombucha, and probiotic sodas, to name a few. Will these boost energy, immunity, and mood? And do they taste okay? This is what we found. **by Rachel Meltzer Warren**


Bolthouse Farms
DAILY GREENS
NO SUGAR ADDED
HEALTH-ADE KOMBUCHA
BERRY LEMONADE
bubbly probiotic tea for a happy gut
16 FL OZ (1 PINT) 473 mL
raspberry lemon
Recess
mood
magnesium & adaptogen infused sparkling water
calm cool collected
12 fl oz (355 ml)
sparkling self-care beverage
droplet
pretty balanced
FIZZY & GUTSY probiotic soda
culture pop soda
WILD BERRIES & lime
12 fl oz (355mL)
suja ORGANIC
MIGHTY DOZEN
APPLE
CELERY
CUCUMBER
KALE
COLLARD GREENS

drinks with ingredients said to confer wellness, according to the research firm Packaged Facts. One possible reason: Consumers have “pill fatigue,” according to Howard Telford, senior industry manager for soft drinks research at Euromonitor International in Chicago. And beverages are seen as an easier, more enjoyable way to get herbs and other supplements into their diets, he says.

While some of these drinks are better for you (though pricier) than sugary sodas or alcohol, do they do all that's claimed? We looked at the ingredients and tasted a number of the beverages. Here's what's actually good for you and how they taste, too.

HEALTHIER GUT

STRESS RELIEVER

IMMUNITY & WELLNESS BOOSTER

PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH ANNE WARD

THE PROMISE

A HEALTHIER GUT

••• **YOU'VE PROBABLY** heard of probiotics and prebiotics, and that they can help keep your digestive system in good working order. (The former are beneficial bacteria that live in your gut, and the latter "feed" them.) You may also be familiar with the fermented tea kombucha—the original probiotic drink.

These days, though, probiotics and prebiotics are being added to a slew of cold drinks. Some are marketed as healthier versions of soda, like Culture Pop, Poppi, and Olipop (three of the five "good for your gut" drinks that CR tested).

"Probiotics can help populate the gut with the healthy bacteria that aid proper digestion and help reduce inflammation, which is at the root of heart disease and many other chronic conditions," says Dalia Perelman, MS, a research dietitian at Stanford University.

But drinks with probiotics may not have the same benefits as foods with probiotics (such as yogurt and kimchi). They're more akin to a supplement in drink form, Perelman says.

That's because the drinks don't have the variety of bacteria that those foods do. Plus, the foods are fermented, a process that creates other compounds that are good for us, according to Perelman. Raw (unpasteurized) kombucha and Spare Food tonic, a drink we tested that contains leftover whey from yogurt making, are fermented. But probiotic sodas are not.

As for prebiotic sodas, some contain added fiber, usually inulin or chicory root extracted from plants. "Here, you're only getting the type of prebiotic that's added in, while you'd likely benefit more from the variety of prebiotics in fiber-rich foods," says Amy Keating, RD, a Consumer Reports nutritionist.

That said, these drinks are lower in calories and added sugars than traditional sodas, so they're a healthier choice if you're watching your intake of sweets. Good to know: Some drinks in our tests contain stevia. Recent research has raised concerns about the health effects of sugar alternatives, so consider limiting your consumption.

TASTE TEST

Healthier-Gut Drinks

Culture Pop Probiotic Soda, Wild Berries & Lime

$2.75 12 OZ.
CALORIES 40
ADDED SUGARS 0 g

This is a sweet and tart combo of mixed berries and lemon/lime flavors. Its only sweetening is from white grape, blackberry, and blueberry fruit juices. The tartness comes from lime juice.

Poppi Prebiotic Soda, Strawberry Lemon

$2 12 OZ.
CALORIES 25
ADDED SUGARS 4 g

Simultaneously sweet and tart, this drink tastes like a blend of berries, with citrus and tropical fruit notes. It contains both added sugars and stevia, with a sweet taste that lingers. The prebiotic here is inulin, a type of added fiber.

Spare Food Probiotic Sparkling Tonic, Blueberry & Ginger

$3.75 12 OZ.
CALORIES 110
ADDED SUGARS 6 g

Tart and slightly salty, this has ginger and berry flavors. Its probiotics come from whey, which also supplies 6 grams of protein and 30 percent of the daily value of calcium.

Olipop Soda, Strawberry Vanilla

$3 12 OZ.
CALORIES 35
ADDED SUGARS 3 g

As fizzy as regular soda, Olipop has candylike strawberry and vanilla flavors and a noticeable stevia taste. It contains a lot of added fiber (9 grams), which could cause digestive upset in some people.

Health-Ade Kombucha, Berry Lemonade

$4.50 16 OZ.
CALORIES 70
ADDED SUGARS 13 g

Like most kombuchas, this one has a tangy sour taste that's similar to apple cider vinegar. While some lemon and raspberry notes come through, it tastes nothing like lemonade.

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: PROP STYLING BY SOPHIA PAPPAS. PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

THE PROMISE

WELLNESS AND STRONGER IMMUNITY

••• **FROM THE LABELS** on their containers to their ingredients lists, these drinks certainly seem to give off "I'm good for you" vibes.

Take, for instance, several of the wellness drinks that CR tested. The company that makes Aura Bora sparkling waters, which contain fragrant herbal extracts such as lavender and elderflower, describes its drinks as delivering "earthly tastes and heavenly feelings." On its website, Ruby Sparkling Hibiscus drinks, which typically contain unusual juices such as those made from blood oranges or Fuji apples, claims they have "1,000+ benefits."

Naked Juice's Green Machine, one of the numerous "green" drinks you may come across in grocery and deli refrigerator cases, features ingredients such as kale and spirulina. And you can't miss the images of broccoli, spinach leaves, green apple, and kiwifruit on its label.

Wellness waters like those from Aura Bora and Ruby can make a nice change from regular seltzer. Plus, they have no added sugars or sugar alternatives. And if you're keeping an eye on calories, Aura Bora has none and Ruby has just 15 (from its juice).

As for those produce-packed green drinks, "they're an easy and convenient way to get some vitamins and minerals in your diet," says Tracey Brigman, RDN, a clinical associate nutrition professor at the University of Georgia.

But keep in mind that green drinks shouldn't be a replacement for eating vegetables, because they have little or none of the healthy fiber found in whole produce. Plus, some green drinks are actually mostly fruit (not vegetable) juice. Although it's natural, the sugar in fruit juice does add calories and can even cause blood sugar spikes.

So if you like green drinks, it's a smart move to opt for those that have vegetables high on their ingredients lists. Suja Organic Cold-Pressed Mighty Dozen, with very little fruit juice, has 80 calories in 12 ounces. Compare that with 270 calories in fruit-juice-laden Naked Juice Green Machine.

TASTE TEST

Wellness and Immunity Drinks

AURA BORA
GRAPEFRUIT ELDERFLOWER

Aura Bora Herbal Sparkling Water, Grapefruit Elderflower

$2.75 12 OZ.
CALORIES 0
ADDED SUGARS 0 g

This fizzy drink tastes a bit like tonic water with some grapefruit and mild floral and herbal flavors—perhaps from its elderflower extracts.

RUBY
SPARKLING HIBISCUS
Blood Orange

Ruby Organic Sparkling Hibiscus, Blood Orange

$2.25 12 OZ.
CALORIES 15
ADDED SUGARS 0 g

The hibiscus makes this tart drink taste something like unsweetened cranberry juice, and it has an underlying citrus flavor thanks to the orange juice it contains—along with a hint of salt.

Naked
GREEN MACHINE

Naked Juice, Green Machine

$4.50 15.2 OZ.
CALORIES 270
ADDED SUGARS 0 g

The sweet, fruity flavors of ingredients like bananas, pineapple, and apple juice dominate in this drink, which has a slightly chalky texture. The solids and liquids separate, so shake well before drinking.

Suja Organic Cold-Pressed, Mighty Dozen

$6 12 OZ.
CALORIES 80
ADDED SUGARS 0 g

Of all the green drinks we looked at, this came closest to a true veggie juice, and the flavors of kale, cucumber, and celery really stood out. You'll also get big ginger flavor, along with mint and lemon. This drink separates quickly, so shake it up as you drink it.

Bolthouse Farms
DAILY GREENS

Bolthouse Farms 100% Fruit & Vegetable Juice Smoothie, Daily Greens

$4.50 15.2 OZ.
CALORIES 150
ADDED SUGARS 0 g

Slightly sweet, this has a nice balance of flavors like apple, cucumber, and pineapple. Unlike the other green drinks we tested, this has a little fiber, mostly from added chicory root, not actual fruits and vegetables.

THE PROMISE

LESS STRESS

••• **DRINKS THAT ARE** meant to improve your mood are fast becoming the new cocktails. Instead of taking the edge off with alcohol, beverages like Recess and Droplet supposedly get their relaxing effects from "adaptogens" such as ashwagandha or mushrooms and nutrients like magnesium. All are said to help your brain and body cope with stress.

These drinks can make a flavorful, alcohol-free alternative to a glass of wine or a cocktail. But for now, there's no way to know if these products live up to their promises. Most of the research on adaptogens has been limited to animals, and the few human studies were very small, Brigman says.

Ashwagandha, for instance—an ingredient in Droplet's Pretty Balanced—was found to reduce stressful feelings and levels of the stress hormone cortisol in people who took 250 to 600 mg daily for eight weeks. But that study, which was published in the journal Cureus in 2019, measured stress levels in just 58 people.

Plus, the "efficacy and potency of plant-based ingredients vary depending on where and how they were grown, when they were harvested, and what part of the plants were used," Brigman says. Although some brands list the amount of adaptogens they contain, there's little clarity on what an effective 'dose' of an adaptogen may be.

In addition, researchers have found that adaptogens may interact with some medications, such as those for autoimmune conditions, high blood pressure, and depression. For that reason, "you should always talk with your healthcare provider prior to adding these to your diet," Brigman says.

TASTE TEST

Stress-Relieving Drinks

Recess Infused Sparkling Water Mood, Raspberry Lemon

$3.75 12 OZ.
CALORIES 20
ADDED SUGARS 0 g

This drink is a little more tart than sweet, with raspberry, citrus, and slight peach flavors. A magnesium-vitamin B6 blend is touted as the relaxation ingredient. It has no added sugars or other sweeteners.

Droplet Sparkling Self-Care Beverage, Pretty Balanced

$6 12 OZ.
CALORIES 35
ADDED SUGARS 0 g

This white peach and lemon verbena drink contains ashwagandha. It's tart and slightly sweet, with lemon and lime flavors plus a hint of canned peaches due to the peach purée it contains. Contents separate quickly.

Elements of Balance Plant-Based Focus Drink, Blueberry Lemon*

$3 11.5 OZ.
CALORIES 10
ADDED SUGARS 0 g

This noncarbonated drink has a sweet blueberry taste and slight bitterness. The monkfruit and stevia sweeteners leave a lingering "sugar substitute" flavor. Contains lion's mane mushroom extract and other adaptogens.

HOW MUCH FLUID DO YOU NEED?

From the claims on various beverages to the large number of people carrying around supersized water bottles, it's pretty clear that Americans are obsessed with hydration. But you may not need to drink as much as you think you do.

The "eight glasses of water a day" adage is reasonable but not a mandate for everyone. Individual needs vary based on weight, age, exercise habits, and even the weather.

Plus, seltzer, milk, fruit juice, and coffee and tea also provide fluids. Caffeine increases urine production, but the water in these drinks compensates for this effect.

Nearly every food we eat has water in it as well, and that fluid also counts toward your daily needs. For example, a small wedge of watermelon provides 7 ounces of water.

Thirst is often a good indicator of fluid needs, though the mechanism that tells us to drink may diminish with age. And for everyone, it's especially important to sip liquids when you exercise or if it's hot and humid out, because you lose fluids when you sweat.

Checking the color of your urine is also a good idea. "A well-hydrated person generally has light-colored urine," says Riana Pryor, PhD, an assistant professor of exercise and nutrition sciences at the University at Buffalo in New York. If your urine is dark, you're probably dehydrated and need to step up your fluid intake.

PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

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*The availability of Elements of Balance drink products may be limited.

THE TRUTH ABOUT ENERGY AND SPORTS DRINKS

A BETTER CAFFEINE PICK-ME-UP?

ON BEVERAGE labels, "energy" is a code word for caffeine. And this stimulant can make you feel more alert, says Tracey Brigman, RDN, a clinical associate nutrition professor at the University of Georgia.

For healthy adults, sipping an energy drink in place of coffee or tea is probably fine, she says, but "you have to consider the caffeine in everything" you consume. (For context, energy drinks typically have 70 to 200 mg of caffeine in 12 ounces; an 8-ounce cup of coffee has 80 to 100 mg.) That's because too much—the Food and Drug Administration considers 400 mg of caffeine a day an acceptable amount for most adults—can have negative effects. In a 2021 review of 32 studies, nearly 25 percent of adults who consumed energy drinks said they experienced insomnia, and nearly 30 percent reported jitteriness, restlessness, or shaky hands.

But the makers of some newer energy drinks, such as Aspire, Celsius, and Clean, suggest that where the caffeine comes from may make a difference. They say ingredients that naturally contain caffeine—such as green tea, guarana seed, and yerba mate—are superior to synthetic caffeine that's been added. For example, the label on Aspire, with 80 mg of caffeine from guarana seed and green tea, says it has "healthy energy" and "natural caffeine," and claims "no jitters, no crash" on its website. But there's no chemical difference between natural caffeine and caffeine extracted in a lab.

Some beverages also contain other supposed energy-boosters, such as B vitamins and chromium. These do help your body use carbohydrates from food for energy, but they won't give you the immediate pep you may be seeking. (Plus, you can get what you need of them from a healthy diet.) And while caffeine and ingredients like L-carnitine and L-theanine may burn a few extra calories, one or two daily energy drinks aren't going to help you lose weight, especially if they have added sugars.

FASTER HYDRATION?

MOST DRINKS can hydrate you. But the promise of sports beverages is that they supply electrolytes (minerals like calcium, potassium, and sodium) or other nutrients that hydrate you faster and perhaps better. Gatorade's Gatorlyte labels claim "rapid rehydration," for example, and Liquid IV says it's "more effective hydration than water alone" on its website.

Electrolytes, which can be lost in sweat, make muscles (including your heart) contract, and "help water and fluids get absorbed properly into your cells," says Jason Machowsky, RD, a sports dietitian and exercise physiologist at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City. But plain water is just as hydrating, and speed doesn't usually matter, he says.

These drinks may have a lot of added sugars and sodium. Gatorade, for instance, has 21 grams of added sugars and 160 mg of sodium in 12 ounces. The American Heart Association's limit for women is 25 grams or less a day; 2,300 mg is the sodium daily value.

Most people can get enough electrolytes from food. An exception: If you're exercising for longer than an hour, especially if you sweat a lot or it's a hot, humid day. You might also want to sip an electrolyte drink if you have diarrhea or have vomited, which can deplete electrolytes. Some doctors recommend these during colonoscopy prep for the same reason.

In addition to sports drinks, a number of beverages offer up blends of different nutrients, sometimes with electrolytes. Vitamin Water calls itself a "nutrient enhanced water beverage," while Bai claims to be an "antioxidant infusion."

"Having nutrients like these in drinks probably isn't giving you any real benefit," says CR's Amy Keating, RD. In some cases, you aren't getting very much of them. For example, Bai Ipanema Pomegranate has just 15 percent of the daily value for vitamin C. "You get far more in a cup of strawberries," she says.

7 HIDDEN FEES—AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

4.50
$22.95
$1 89
7.97

All those extra costs tacked onto food deliveries, hotel rooms, and airplane tickets really add up. Here's the way to pay less.

$22.95
4.50
$1 89
7.97

BY LISA L. GILL

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER RYAN

CALL IT FEE-FLATION: Americans are being slammed with hidden fees from almost every direction, forcing us to pay more for goods and services than we budgeted for.

Fees lurk in our cable and mobile phone bills; are tacked onto airfares, hotel room rates, and car rentals; and are quietly levied on our checking accounts—to name just a handful.

Individually, such fees can be modest and may not seem worth getting upset about. But together they add up: We spend more than $64 billion a year in junk fees, according to a White House analysis—more than $500 per household.

To be sure, not all fees are a problem. What makes some junkier than others is that they should have been included in the advertised price—not sprung on you at the last minute. That's especially true of fees you can't avoid unless you abandon the purchase entirely, such as some airline fees.

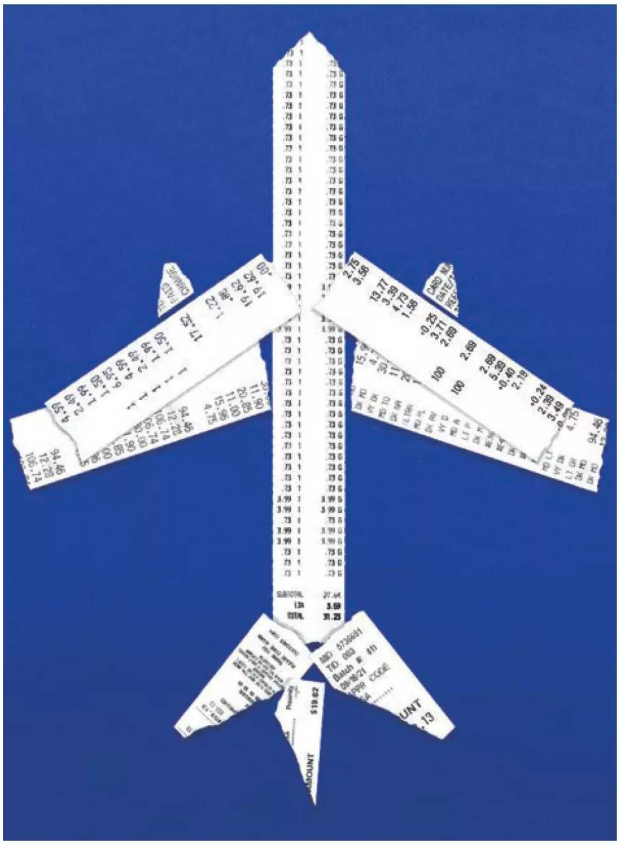
In other cases, says CR's director of financial services policy, Chuck Bell, a fee is problematic simply because it's excessive. Being charged $29 for overdrafting your checking account by $1 is a good example, he says.

Junk fees make it difficult to comparison shop and increase the costs of things. With event tickets, for example, "convenience" and other fees can boost the final price by 20 percent or more.

Fortunately, change may be coming. Spurred by the Biden administration—as well as CR advocates—the Federal Trade Commission, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the Federal Communications Commission, and other agencies have proposed rules that, if enacted, would limit a range of junk fees. At press time, the CFPB was expected to finalize a rule to limit fees for late credit card payments to no more than $8 or 25 percent of the minimum balance due, vs. the $30 to $41 that credit card companies currently charge. The rule would take effect in the spring.

The administration is also supporting the Junk Fee Prevention Act, which would require that the fees tacked onto concert and theater tickets, hotel resort fees, fees for families to sit together on airplanes, and others be disclosed upfront to consumers when they're shopping online.

Here, we highlight some of the most egregious fees and suggest ways to minimize or avoid them.



Airlines

BOARDING PASS FEES, SEAT SELECTION FEES, AND MORE

● Airlines are aggressive players of the tacked-on-cost game, asking travelers to pay extra to avoid every conceivable discomfort of air travel. Many, for example, charge $5 and up extra to choose a seat in advance, to avoid being assigned one when you check in.

"Don't count on sitting with your friends or family" unless you're willing to pay extra for everyone, says William J. McGee, a senior fellow for aviation and travel at the American Economic Liberties Project. (The Junk Fee Prevention Act would require that airlines let families with young children sit together for free.)

Another opportunity to exact fees: early boarding. So you can beat the crowd and find room for your bag, Southwest charges begin at $30, United at $24, and Frontier at up to $12.

Even mundane requests can cost you. Checking in with a counter agent will set you back $25 at Frontier Airlines. At Spirit, printing out a boarding pass at an airline counter costs $25.

WHAT TO DO: First, know that some airlines don't charge all of these fees. Southwest, for example, still allows you to check two bags for free. Alaska Air still lets you make free seat selections. Second, you can sometimes bypass fees by downloading an airline's app to your smartphone. That way your boarding pass will be on your phone.

Finally, note that fees will often be more transparent if you book directly with an airline's website or through a travel agent, rather than with a third-party travel website such as Expedia or Orbitz, McGee says.

Restaurants and Food Delivery

CREDIT CARD PROCESSING (AKA "SWIPE") FEES, KITCHEN AND SERVICE FEES

● In the face of increasing costs, some restaurants are charging for things that used to be built into their menu prices. Some charge a "service fee" or "kitchen fee" of around 5 percent to 20 percent, purportedly to help compensate "back of house" staff. That's in addition to the 15 to 20 percent tips that servers typically expect.

Restaurants also increasingly charge a 1.5 to 3 percent fee for paying with a credit or debit card, effectively passing on to you the processing fees they pay on those transactions.

And, if you're looking to have food delivered, you may be charged higher per-item prices when you order through a third-party delivery service such as Uber Eats, Grubhub, or DoorDash.

WHAT TO DO: Except in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and

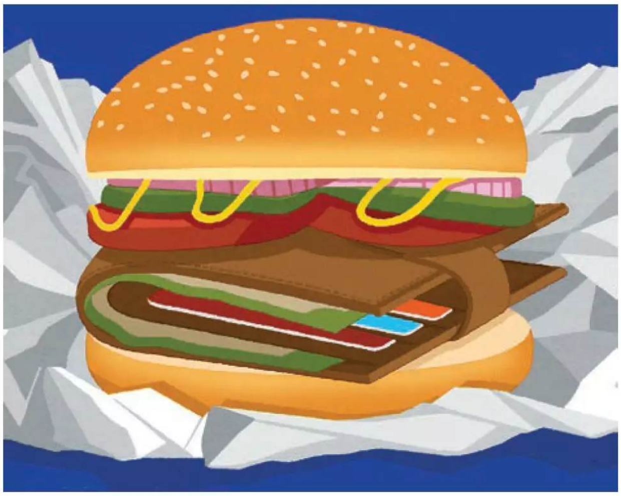
Car Rentals

TOLL TRANSPONDER FEES

● Many rental car companies charge a daily fee to use their toll transponders. Alamo, Avis, Budget, Enterprise, and National charge $3.95 to $4.95 a day. You can choose to opt in when you pick up the rental.

The problem is that opting out can trigger even bigger fees. Hertz, for example, charges $4.95 to use its transponder if you activate it in advance—but $9.99 a day if you opt out and then drive through a toll. Sixt charges a $5 per toll "administrative fee" if you opt out and then drive through a toll.

WHAT TO DO: If you have a transponder for your car at home, you might be able to bring it with you for use in the rental—provided you'll be traveling in a region where your transponder is accepted, and your state allows you to move the unit from car to car. (Some may require you to add the rental to your account.) If not, it makes sense to agree to the transponder fee when you pick up the car.



Oklahoma, where it's illegal, restaurants can charge "swipe" fees. But they have to tell you that upfront, says CR's Bell. If they don't, ask to have the fee waived (or for an equivalent discount).

Food delivery fees, on the other hand, are hard to get around. The only way to possibly avoid the menu upcharges and service and delivery fees is to call in your order directly to the restaurant, pick it up yourself, and pay in cash.

Hotels

RESORT FEES, DESTINATION FEES

● Once upon a time, "resort" fees supposedly covered amenities that went above and beyond the basic services you expect from a hotel—exclusive beach access, for example, or gym facilities. These days you generally have to pay these fees (which average about $25 a day) whether you use the fitness room or not. Many hotels in U.S. tourist meccas like Las Vegas, Miami, and New York go further, charging what they call "destination fees" merely for the privilege of booking a room. Those fees can run around $50 a night on top of the advertised room rate.

WHAT TO DO: Complain, then negotiate. Call the hotel, request a full list of fees, and ask to have them waived—or, if the fees are fixed, for the room rate to be reduced by the same amount. To increase your chance of success, avoid paying in advance, haggle before you check in, and book directly with the hotel. (They often won't budge on rates you get through third-party booking websites, says McGee.)

Also, book through a travel agent, who may have access to deals and discounts that essentially offset the fees.

Banking

ACCOUNT MAINTENANCE FEES, ATM FEES, INSUFFICIENT FUNDS FEES, OVERDRAFT FEES

● Some banks charge $5 to $35 a month for maintaining a checking or savings account. And many charge a fee if you withdraw cash from an out-of-network ATM; the average is $4.73 per transaction, according to a 2023 Bankrate study.

Many banks also charge overdraft fees for allowing a check or other debit transaction to go through when you don't have enough funds to cover it. On the flip side, they may charge an insufficient funds (or NSF) fee when they instead decline a transaction on an overdrawn account. Both range from $19 to $38 per transaction.

WHAT TO DO: While ATM and account fees may not qualify as "junk" fees because it's reasonable for banks to charge for the services, what's clear is that they can be avoided.

To avoid ATM fees, choose a bank with a lot of nearby in-network ATMs or look for one that's part of a large ATM network such as Allpoint, Co-op, or MoneyPass, which are mainly used by online and community banks and credit unions. To figure out which network is best for you, use the ATM locator tool on the bank's website.

To avoid account fees, make sure you're enrolled in the type of account that suits your financial situation: Your bank may offer multiple checking account options—some that minimize fees if you maintain a sizable balance and others that keep costs low if you don't. Another option is to switch banks. As with ATM fees, online banks and credit unions are likely to offer free or low-cost accounts.

Switching may also be wise if you're being hit with hefty overdraft or NSF fees. Bank of America, Chase, and Wells Fargo have eliminated NSF fees; Citi has gotten rid of overdraft fees; and some online banks and credit unions have eliminated some of those fees, too.

Broadband Internet and Pay Television

BROADCAST TV FEES, REGIONAL SPORTS FEES, INFRASTRUCTURE FEES, NETWORK ENHANCEMENT FEES, DEREGULATED ADMINISTRATION FEES, TECHNOLOGY SERVICE FEES, AND MORE

● While some fees are mandated by the government, cable, internet, and satellite television bills are rife with company-imposed fees. These often include broadcast TV fees, regional sports fees, modem and router equipment fees, and infrastructure fees. These let providers advertise low monthly rates while actually charging customers much more.

The Federal Communications Commission has proposed requiring providers to create a standardized label, modeled on the familiar food nutrition label, that would list prices, including fees, in a uniform way.

WHAT TO DO: Call the company and threaten to cancel your service if it doesn't drop the company-imposed fees. If that doesn't work, keep in mind that millions of American households have "cut the cord," opting to get their video programing from an internet streaming service such as Fubo, an over-the-air digital antenna, or both, rather than via traditional cable services.

Payment Apps

TRANSFER FEES

● The "peer-to-peer" or P2P payment apps Cash App, PayPal, and Venmo charge a fee of between 0.5 and 1.75 percent of the transaction if you want incoming funds transferred to your bank account immediately, rather than in one to three business days. "Companies pass on the fees they get charged for instant transfers to customers, and it's not fair," says Ed Mierzwinski, senior director of federal consumer programs at U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG). "You should have immediate access to your money, without penalty."

WHAT TO DO: You can have your money transferred to your bank account for free if you're willing to wait one to three business days for it. If you routinely need instant access to incoming P2P funds, however, consider using Zelle, which partners directly with banks and transfers money immediately for no charge.

CR TO THE FTC:

END JUNK FEES NOW!

Consumer Reports advocates are urging the Federal Trade Commission to rein in junk fees, hidden fees, and optional fees in everything from internet and cable pricing to hotel rooms, concert tickets, and bank accounts. These measures would require companies to clearly disclose optional fees so that consumers can understand and review them before deciding to purchase that product or service. To sign our petition, go to **CR.org/endjunkfees** or scan the QR code below.

SCAN THIS QR CODE
Sign the petition to end junk fees.

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

FIRST DRIVE

Toyota Tacoma

The 2024 Toyota Tacoma is available in two-door extended cab and four-door crew cab configurations, with a choice of 5- and 6-foot beds; and rear- and four-wheel drive. Most versions are powered by a 278-hp, 2.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine. A 326-hp, 2.4-liter turbocharged hybrid four-cylinder joins the line in spring 2024.

CR'S TAKE The new Tacoma has a better driving position, an improved ride, a more comfortable interior, and peppier performance. Plus, it is quieter than the truck it replaces.

BASE PRICE RANGE
$31,500-$52,100
DESTINATION CHARGE $1,495
PRICE AS DRIVEN $53,990

ASK OUR EXPERTS

How often do I need to wash road salt off my car?

Road salt, or a liquid version of it, is used to melt snow and ice on roads across the U.S. If you drive on salted roads, your car may be covered with the stuff. **Salt accelerates corrosion** and can impede safety-related equipment involving braking, steering, suspension, and fuel systems. It can also obscure headlights, taillights, and the sensors for automatic emergency braking. CR advises going monthly during snow season to a **touchless car wash** that cleans your whole car, including the undercarriage.

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Reminding Rear Passengers to Buckle Up

Back-seat passengers who wear a seat belt in cars are 55 percent less likely to be injured in the event of crash. And yet they are also less likely than front-seat passengers to buckle up. Now the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is proposing that passenger vehicles be required to have alerts warning drivers when passengers aren't belted in. NHTSA says this could prevent hundreds of injuries and save many lives. "Alerts should be effective, and automakers should comply without delay," says Gabe Knight, safety policy analyst at CR.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

$^{\$}$600

The average cost to repair tire and/or wheel damage that can be caused by driving over a pothole, according to a AAA study of 2021 data. Potholes form when ice melts, so drivers should be especially careful in spring.

RECALL

Acura/Honda

American Honda Motor Co. is recalling 248,999 vehicles, including the 2015 to 2020 Acura TLX; 2016 to 2020 Acura MDX; 2016, 2018, and 2019 Honda Pilot; 2017 and 2019 Honda Ridgeline; and 2018 and 2019 Honda Odyssey because of a possible problem with connecting rod bearings, which are essential to engine operation. Recalled vehicles' engines might not start or run properly, and/or could stall while driving.

WHAT TO DO: Dealerships will inspect and repair, or replace the engine as necessary, free of charge. Contact Honda customer service at 888-234-2138.

PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

These Are the Cars Owners Love Most

Lexus NX
Plug-in
Hybrid

Sports cars, family-friendly SUVs, EVs, and hybrids make our "most satisfying" list, according to our survey of Consumer Reports members.

BY JONATHAN LINKOV

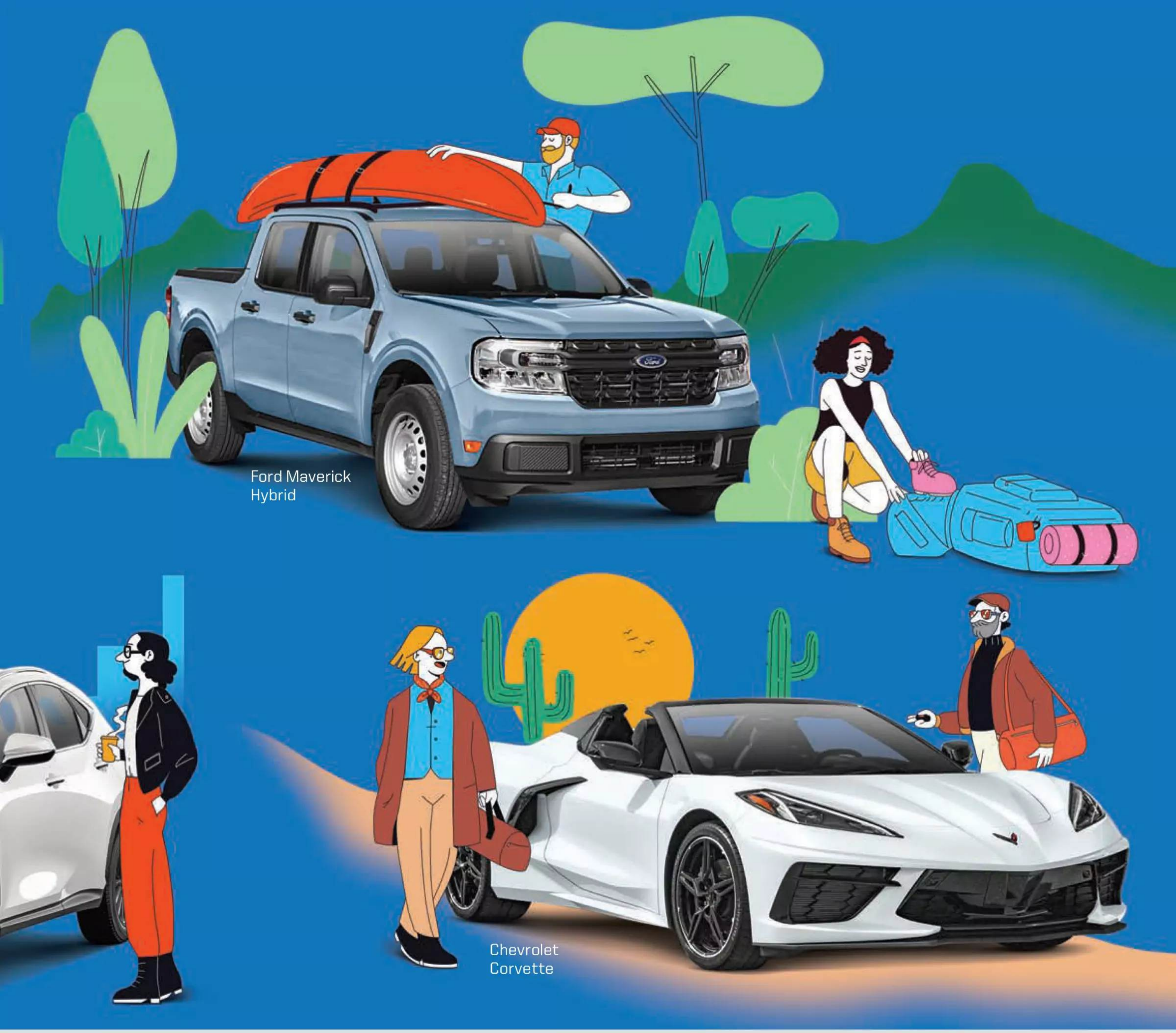
W**HAT MAKES** a car owner satisfied with their purchase, even after owning it for two, three, or five years? It's simple: The car lives up to their expectations when it comes to performance, comfort, fuel economy, and other important attributes.

Consumer Reports' latest satisfaction survey reveals that all types of cars can rise to the top of the most-loved list. "Depending on the buyer, a satisfying vehicle might be a fun sports car, an efficient electric vehicle [EV], or a roomy SUV," says Jake Fisher, CR's senior director of auto testing.

The cars with the lowest satisfaction scores are the models that don't deliver on high gas mileage claims, for example, or "luxury" models that turn out to be loud, cramped, and less elegant than expected.

How do we determine which cars are the most lovable and which aren't? Our findings are based on the answers to this key question: Given the opportunity, would you buy or

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARCOS MONTIEL



lease this vehicle again? (Our detailed methodology is described on page 54.) This year we received responses from owners of more than 330,000 cars, SUVs, trucks, and minivans. Our findings include insights on EVs and hybrids, along with the most and least satisfying models in their classes.

Keep in mind that the cars owners love aren't necessarily the ones that excel in our testing. "A vehicle could have below-average reliability or not be a standout in our testing and still make owners happy," says Steven Elek, who oversees auto data analytics at CR.

Most and Least Satisfying Cars

PERCENTAGE OF OWNERS WHO WOULD BUY THEIR VEHICLE AGAIN

93%	Chevrolet Corvette	48%	Nissan Altima
88%	Rivian R1T	47%	Volkswagen Jetta
88%	Mazda MX-5 Miata	47%	Kia Forte
87%	Lexus NX Plug-in Hybrid	46%	Mercedes-Benz C-Class
85%	BMW X5	45%	Kia Seltos
84%	Rivian R1S	44%	Nissan Kicks
83%	Ford Maverick Hybrid	42%	Kia Sorento Hybrid
82%	Kia Telluride	39%	Nissan Sentra
82%	Honda Pilot	38%	Volkswagen Taos
81%	Hyundai Ioniq 6	25%	Infiniti QX50

Owners who responded "definitely yes" when asked if they would buy their vehicle again, given everything they know about it.

WORSE BETTER

EVs and Hybrids Charge Ahead

In the past few years we've seen EVs and hybrids replace gas-only cars at the top of our satisfaction ratings. Rivian's R1T pickup truck—an EV that made the list in 2023—and Rivian's R1S SUV are on the most satisfying list this year. "While the Rivians have some reliability problems, owners are willing to look past them because of the unique features and incredible performance that attracted them to the brand," says Fisher.

They are joined by two newcomers—the Hyundai Ioniq 6 EV and the Lexus NX plug-in hybrid (PHEV). The Ford Maverick Hybrid pickup truck is a repeat performer.

In fact, hybrids continue to make a strong showing: Almost every hybrid scored higher than its gas-only sibling. While the Toyota Corolla Hybrid bested the regular Corolla by only a slim 4 points, other models had significant differences. The Ford Escape Hybrid scored 20 points better than the regular Escape. "Not only does the hybrid version deliver better fuel economy, but its electric motor generally contributes to a calmer, more pleasant driving experience," Fisher says.

Scores for PHEVs, which run solely on electricity for short distances and switch to hybrid mode when the charge runs out, were more mixed. Good performers include the Toyota RAV4 Prime, which scored almost 20 points higher than the regular RAV4, and the RAV4 Hybrid, which scored 13 points above the conventional version. And the Escape PHEV was a remarkable 24 points above the regular Escape.

But satisfaction sagged for others. The Audi Q5, BMW X5, and Volvo XC60 PHEVs all had lower satisfaction scores than their non-hybrid siblings, perhaps in part because they also had worse reliability than the gas-only versions.

Practical Is Best

Models that are at home on a race track as well as on a winding country road still top the satisfaction list, though they are being edged out. While last year there were six performance cars among the top 10, this year there are just two: the Chevrolet Corvette and Mazda MX-5 Miata. "Sports car buyers seek models that are fun to drive, and the Corvette and Miata don't disappoint," says Fisher. "The Corvette

Tops in Comfort, Storage, Fuel Economy

This year the EV automaker Rivian, with its R1S and R1T, takes Tesla's former perch at the top of our brand satisfaction list. It's joined by a number of other luxury automakers that are frequently found in the top 10, including BMW, Porsche, Tesla, Genesis, and Lexus, along with mainstream automakers Subaru, Ram, and Honda. The biggest move up the list came from Mini, which jumped 11 spots to number two.

We've broken out our data to show which brands satisfy owners the most in specific areas, including comfort, driving, cabin storage, in-cabin experience and usability, and ownership cost. Use these lists to find out which brands score highly in the qualities you care about the most. Then focus your search on brands that did well—and skip those that did poorly.

COMFORT

Includes seat comfort, cabin noise, and ride comfort, among other factors.

MOST SATISFYING

- **Porsche**
- **Genesis**
- **Audi**
- **BMW**
- **Lexus**
- **Rivian**

LEAST SATISFYING

- **Infiniti**

DRIVING

Takes into account handling and how quickly the vehicle gains speed.

MOST SATISFYING

- **Tesla**
- **Rivian**
- **Porsche**
- **BMW**
- **Genesis**
- **Lincoln**

LEAST SATISFYING

- **Volkswagen**

is a bargain-priced Ferrari, and the Miata is so fun to drive, it will put a smile on anyone's face."

The Kia Telluride again makes the list, and is joined by the newly redesigned Honda Pilot. These three-row SUVs are comfortable, have straightforward controls, and can carry up to eight people. BMW's X5 bridges the gap between sports cars and SUVs. It's quick and nimble but can also carry five people in quiet comfort.

The Trouble With Budget Cars

Six of the 10 least satisfying models are making repeat appearances: the Kia Forte and Seltos, Infiniti QX50, Nissan Altima and Kicks, and Volkswagen Taos. The Kias, Nissans, and VW are all basic, lower-cost models for their categories. It isn't surprising, because models built to meet a low price often have loud cabins, stiff rides, and less appealing interiors.

The entry-level models of luxury brands have similar flaws. They can be loud, have fewer luxury touches, and overall don't deliver the experience of their more expensive brand siblings.

The Infiniti QX50 SUV and Mercedes-Benz C-Class sedan are examples of this. The QX50 has ponderous handling and complex controls, and doesn't deliver the fuel savings that Infiniti promises, while the C-Class' complicated controls, cramped interior, and stiff ride diminish its luxury promise.

"Instead of paying a premium for a luxury nameplate, we recommend buying a non-luxury model's top trim," Elek says.

CABIN STORAGE

Includes cup holders and dashboard and center console storage but does not include the trunk.

MOST SATISFYING

- ⏫ **Ram**
- ⌃ **Lincoln**
- ⌃ **Tesla**
- ⌃ **Chrysler**
- ⌃ **Rivian**
- ⌃ **Ford**

LEAST SATISFYING

- ⏬ **Audi**

USABILITY

How easy it is to use the in-car electronics, including Bluetooth connections.

MOST SATISFYING

- ⌃ **Genesis**
- ⌃ **Lincoln**
- ⌃ **Jeep**
- ⌃ **Cadillac**
- ⌃ **BMW**
- ⌃ **Buick**

LEAST SATISFYING

- ⌄ **Volkswagen**

OWNERSHIP COST

Includes costs for fuel, insurance, maintenance, and repairs.

MOST SATISFYING

- ⌃ **Tesla**
- ⌃ **Hyundai**
- ⌃ **Rivian**
- ⌃ **Toyota**
- ❘ **Mazda**
- ❘ **Kia**

LEAST SATISFYING

- ⏬ **Mercedes-Benz**

⏬ ⌄ ❘ ⌃ ⏫
WORSE ├──┤ BETTER

Owner Satisfaction by Brand

		PERCENTAGE OF OWNERS WHO WOULD BUY AGAIN
1	Rivian	86%
2	Mini	77%
3	BMW	76%
4	Porsche	76%
5	Tesla	74%
6	Genesis	73%
7	Lexus	73%
8	Subaru	70%
9	Ram	69%
10	Honda	69%
11	Chevrolet	69%
12	Toyota	69%
13	Hyundai	68%
14	Acura	68%
15	Ford	67%
16	GMC	67%
17	Mazda	66%
18	Volvo	66%
19	Lincoln	65%
20	Buick	64%
21	Kia	63%
22	Cadillac	61%
23	Chrysler	60%
24	Mercedes-Benz	59%
25	Audi	59%
26	Jeep	58%
27	Nissan	55%
28	Volkswagen	51%
29	Infiniti	43%

Kia Niro EV

Most and Least Satisfying Models in Their Class

These charts are designed to help you find the car likely to satisfy you most. Even cars that don't rank high in overall satisfaction can excel in ways that matter to you, such as how comfortable they are or whether the infotainment system is easy to master. Similarly, some models with high satisfaction scores may still have specific issues that will make you want to pass. We asked owners to rate their satisfaction when considering their vehicle's seat and cabin comfort, driving, cabin storage, in-cabin experience and usability, and ownership cost. Use their feedback and corresponding scores to identify models that fit your needs.

HOW WE RATE SATISFACTION: Results are from the 2023 Annual Auto Surveys, involving more than 330,000 vehicles. Data from the 2021 to 2023 model years (plus a few 2024 models) were averaged, provided a vehicle wasn't significantly changed over that time. Some ratings might be based on a single model year. The owner satisfaction score is based on the percentage of owners who responded "definitely yes" to the question of whether they would buy the same vehicle if they had to do it all over again (considering price, performance, reliability, comfort, enjoyment, etc.). Ratings and scores for the factors were determined based on the percentage of owners who said they were very satisfied.

COMFORT

While owners of the most satisfying models commended their vehicle's comfort, Murano owners were effusive, praising its comfortable seats and quiet cabin. Miata owners repeatedly noted how hard it was to get in and out of, while Wrangler owners bemoaned a lack of ride comfort.

MOST SATISFYING

↑ SPORTS/SPORTY CARS
⇈ **Audi A5**

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
⇈ **Nissan Murano**

ELECTRIC VEHICLES
⇈ **Kia Niro EV**

COMPACT CARS
↑ **Toyota Prius**

LEAST SATISFYING

SPORTS/SPORTY CARS
⇊ **Mazda MX-5 Miata**

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
⇊ **Jeep Wrangler**

ELECTRIC VEHICLES
↓ **Nissan Leaf**

COMPACT CARS
⇊ **Toyota Corolla Hatchback**

DRIVING

Suburban and Yukon XL owners liked the handling of their big SUVs, while CX-30 owners enjoyed the small SUV's "ride and performance" and fun-to-drive nature. Taos owners were bothered by how the SUV surged when starting from a stop, while the Compass was faulted for its "weak acceleration."

MOST SATISFYING

↑ COMPACT CARS
⏫ **Toyota Prius**

SUBCOMPACT SUVs
⏫ **Mazda CX-30**

COMPACT SUVs
⏫ **Toyota RAV4 Prime**

MIDSIZED 3-ROW/LARGE SUVs
⏫ **Chevrolet Suburban/ GMC Yukon XL**

LEAST SATISFYING

COMPACT SUVs
⏬ **Jeep Compass**

SUBCOMPACT SUVs
🔽 **Volkswagen Taos**

COMPACT CARS
⏬ **Nissan Kicks**

MIDSIZED 3-ROW/LARGE SUVs
🔽 **Volkswagen Atlas**

CABIN STORAGE

Tesla owners found plenty of space for both passengers and cargo, while Mini owners liked how the Countryman had "lots of room for hauling stuff." Owners of the Audi Q7 weren't fans of its limited cabin storage, while one Leaf owner said about cabin storage space: "Make it bigger."

MOST SATISFYING

↑ LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
🔼 **Mini Cooper Countryman**

ELECTRIC CARS
🔼 **Tesla Model S**

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
⏫ **Honda Passport**

LUXURY MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs
⏫ **Lincoln Aviator**

LEAST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
⏬ **Jeep Wrangler**

ELECTRIC SUVs
⏬ **Subaru Solterra/ Toyota bZ4X**

ELECTRIC CARS
⏬ **Nissan Leaf**

LUXURY MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs
⏬ **Audi Q7**

USABILITY

Corsair and GLE owners praised their cars' available features and technology. But the controls in the Volvo, Lexus, Volkswagen, and Subaru were panned, with a Lexus owner asking for it to "be more user-friendly" and Volkswagen drivers wishing the "controls [were] less complicated."

MOST SATISFYING

↑ MIDSIZED/LARGE CARS
🔼 **Honda Accord Hybrid**

LUXURY MIDSIZED SUVs
⏫ **Mercedes-Benz GLE**

ELECTRIC SUVs
⏫ **Genesis GV60**

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
🔼 **Lincoln Corsair**

LEAST SATISFYING

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
⏬ **Volvo XC60 Plug-in Hybrid**

LUXURY MIDSIZED SUVs
🔽 **Lexus RX**

ELECTRIC SUVs
⏬ **Volkswagen ID.4**

MIDSIZED/LARGE CARS
🔽 **Subaru Legacy**

OWNERSHIP COST

Trailblazer, Highlander, NX, and Maverick owners all praised their vehicles' fuel economy; one Maverick owner said, "Being able to get 40 mpg makes it … perfect for my job." But owners of the Q3 complained of reliability headaches and maintenance costs.

MOST SATISFYING

↑ SUBCOMPACT SUVs
🔼 **Chevrolet Trailblazer**

MIDSIZED 3-ROW/LARGE SUVs
🔼 **Toyota Highlander Hybrid**

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
🔼 **Lexus NX Plug-in Hybrid**

SMALL/MIDSIZED PICKUPS
⏫ **Ford Maverick Hybrid**

LEAST SATISFYING

SUBCOMPACT SUVs
🔽 **Honda HR-V**

MIDSIZED 3-ROW/LARGE SUVs
⏬ **Chevrolet Suburban/ GMC Yukon XL**

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
⏬ **Audi Q3**

SMALL/MIDSIZED PICKUPS
⏬ **Chevrolet Colorado/ GMC Canyon**

⏬ 🔽 ! 🔼 ⏫
WORSE ⟷ BETTER

TRACK INTELLIGENCE

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CR'S TEAM OF AUTO EXPERTS

Cars That Are Really Fun to Drive

CR'S AUTO TEST TEAM LOVES CARS, but of the dozens they drive each year, the most memorable are the ones that are a treat to drive.

"An agile car with quick acceleration and a satisfying sound can be a pleasure," says Gabe Shenhar, associate director of CR's Auto Test Center. "When it's also reliable, fuel-efficient, and within your budget, it's even more enjoyable."

And don't make the mistake of thinking that only sporty performance cars can deliver excitement on the road: CR's testers have found numerous sedans, luxury cars, and even small SUVs that can be entertaining.

The models below are among those our experts say rank near the top in the fun department yet are also reliable, safe, and fuel-efficient. We provide a mix of new and used in several categories and a wide range of prices.

SPORTS CAR

2023 Mazda MX-5 Miata
$28,050-$38,950

FUN FACTOR: Driving a small, capable, and attractive two-seater with the top down and the wind in your hair is the quintessence of automotive fun, and the Miata delivers that in its purest form.

PROS: On top of its nimble handling, a playful exhaust sound, and classic sports car proportions, the Miata tends to have strong resale value, in case you ever need to trade it for something more practical.

CONS: The tight interior might be cramped for larger drivers. The trunk is very small—well under 5 cubic feet—with only enough room for some groceries, or luggage for a weekend getaway.

SMALL CAR

2015-16 Ford C-Max
$8,600-$11,725

FUN FACTOR: The C-Max hybrid is more than just a utilitarian economy car. It offers lively handling, and the electric motor in its hybrid powertrain provides a healthy dose of torque for zippy acceleration.

PROS: Along with its agility, the C-Max has a stable ride, a roomy interior, hatchback utility, and more than 24 cubic feet of cargo space (less in the plug-in hybrid version, which has a larger battery pack). The C-Max got 37 mpg overall in our fuel economy testing, and CR members reported seeing higher figures.

CONS: The testers found that certain controls were annoying to operate; some may find its minivan-esque looks a turnoff.

SMALL SUV

2024 Mazda CX-5
$29,300-$40,600

FUN FACTOR: The sporty handling, sleek styling, and responsive steering of the CX-5 set it apart from more rational, less exciting choices such as the Honda CR-V and Subaru Forester. Its engaging dynamics and SUV utility prove that you can have your cake and eat it too.

PROS: Compared with other SUVs in its price range, the CX-5 has a more comfortable ride, one of the quietest, highest-quality interiors available, and standard automatic emergency braking.

CONS: It has less interior space and worse visibility than its dowdy competitors, and its complicated infotainment controls can take awhile to get used to.

LUXURY CAR

2016, 2018, 2022 BMW 3 Series
$11,025-$46,450

FUN FACTOR: Long known as one of the best sports sedans on the market, the 3 Series has the requisite agile handling, responsive brakes and steering, and snappy acceleration. It's also downright playful. The 2019 redesign brought more active safety features and better fuel economy.

PROS: The 3 Series blends great performance and handling with dapper styling, a luxurious interior, and a relatively easy-to-use infotainment system.

CONS: Routine maintenance can be more expensive than for nonluxury models, and if the car is out of warranty, repairs can be very pricey.

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

ROAD TEST

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER

MIDSIZED THREE-ROW SUVs

✓ Toyota Grand Highlander

Big and Roomy With a Noisy Engine

80

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 81

HIGHS Comfortable ride, lots of passenger and cargo room

LOWS Short on handling agility, noisy engine

POWERTRAIN 265-hp, 2.4-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 22 mpg on regular

PRICE $43,070-$58,125 base price + $1,395 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $49,457

ADDING 6 INCHES of length to the Highlander puts Toyota in a more competitive position within the midsized three-row SUV class. We found the Grand Highlander to be comfortable and roomy, with a legit third-row seat, bountiful cargo space, and the same 22 mpg overall as the regular Highlander. But its engine lacks refinement, and the interior is short on luxury touches buyers might expect.

Press hard on the gas pedal and the turbocharged four-cylinder engine delivers ample power and plenty of midrange torque. But the engine sounds gritty and unappealing, and the eight-speed automatic delivers some slightly rough shifts.

The ride is cushier than that of most competitors, particularly with the smaller 18-inch tires on our XLE trim. It handles reasonably well during regular driving but felt ungainly when pushed to its limit through our collision-avoidance test, posting a 3-mph slower speed than the regular Highlander.

The front seats are comfortable for most body types. The second row has excellent underleg support, great foot space, and plenty of knee room. But the flat, unsupportive seatback can become tiresome on road trips. Hop into the third row and you'll find one of the roomier ones out there, capable of accommodating adults for short trips. Max cargo capacity benefits from about 7 extra cubic feet.

We appreciate the physical knobs and buttons for many common tasks. But wading through menus within the instrument panel is confusing.

AEB with pedestrian detection, highway-speed AEB, BSW, and RCTW all come standard.

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs

Alfa Romeo Tonale

Fuel-Efficient but a Disappointing Drive

56

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 71

HIGHS Quick acceleration, fuel-efficient, can run as an EV part-time

LOWS Stiff ride, loud cabin, unintuitive controls, lacks typical Alfa engine sounds and handling

POWERTRAIN 285-hp, 1.3-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder plug-in hybrid engine; 6-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 29 mpg on premium

PRICE $43,845-$51,040 base price + $1,595 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $47,790

THE TONALE comes standard as a plug-in hybrid and packs power and good fuel economy. But this little SUV lacks typical Alfa traits, such as a sporty engine sound and sharp handling, while the ride is stiff and the cabin is loud—much like the Dodge Hornet, it mechanical twin (reviewed on the next page).

Go easy on the accelerator pedal and the Alfa can cover 33 miles on electric power delivered to the rear axle, after which it engages a 1.3-liter turbocharged four-cylinder to drive the front wheels. The combined 285 hp ensures quick acceleration, with 0 to 60 mph in just 6.3 seconds. But in hybrid mode there can be a big power delay taking off from a stop, and sometimes the engine revs abnormally high at stoplights to keep the battery charged to a certain level. The engine will kick on midway through a turn if the system determines there isn't enough EV power, delivering a disconcerting—but not dangerous—burst of power to the front wheels.

We found the ride stiff and choppy. The SUV bounces up and down over bumps like you're riding a pogo stick—minus the fun. Although cabin quietness benefits from the ability to run the SUV solely on electric power at times, the rear motor groans during regenerative braking, and we noted unusually high levels of road and wind noise.

We like the body-hugging front seats. The rear seat has adequate headroom and good foot space, but the seatback is pretty upright. The infotainment screen is plagued with tiny icons that are difficult to decipher and pinpoint while driving.

AEB with pedestrian detection, highway-speed AEB, BSW, and RCTW are standard.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

COMPACT SUVs

Dodge Hornet

Powerful but Problematic

55

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 59

HIGHS Quick acceleration

LOWS Stiff ride, loud cabin, unintuitive controls, awkward driving position, cheap interior, poor visibility

POWERTRAIN 268-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 9-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 23 mpg on premium

PRICE $31,400-$46,400 base price + $1,595 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $34,675

THE HORNET is Dodge's first all-new model in almost a decade. Given the wait and the number of strong small-SUV competitors, we expected better. Although it accelerates with vigor, its stiff ride, awkward driving position, and loud cabin filled with cheap plastic drastically diminish its appeal.

Big power in a small package is the Hornet's selling point. Thanks to a 268-hp, turbocharged four-cylinder that packs a healthy midrange punch, it flew from 0 to 60 mph in a quick-for-its-class 6.4 seconds. But that power comes at a cost. A combination of turbo lag and the transmission often ending up in the wrong gear results in low-speed hiccups and power delays, and fuel economy is below average for the class. Plus, the chassis struggles to handle the abundant torque the Hornet possesses, which can cause the steering wheel to tug back and forth in your hands when accelerating.

The suspension is brittle over bumps, and jostles passengers back and forth. Yet it doesn't reward that compromise with confident handling. There's little body roll, but the rubbery steering feels artificially heavy.

Limited seat adjustments and a left footrest that's too close to the driver leave you with tightly bent knees and outstretched arms. At least there are well-placed armrests and decent headroom. The rear seat has adequate headroom, along with good knee room and foot space under the front seats. The infotainment screen is nicely designed, but the icons and text are small, and can be hard to decipher and press while driving.

AEB with pedestrian detection, highway-speed AEB, BSW, and RCTW are standard.

LUXURY COMPACTS SUVs

Mercedes-Benz GLC

Classy and Quiet With Confusing Controls

51

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 78

HIGHS Quiet cabin, high-quality interior materials, comfortable front seats, short dry-stopping distance

LOWS Unintuitive controls, overly firm ride, mushy brake pedal

POWERTRAIN 255-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 9-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 26 mpg on premium

PRICE $47,100-$53,550 base price + $1,150 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $58,195

THE REDESIGNED GLC remains a competitive entry in the compact luxury SUV class, with good fuel economy, a quiet and well-made cabin, and comfortable seats. It earns a decent road-test score, but Mercedes' below-par brand reliability brings its Overall Score way down.

After an initial delay taking off from a stop, the GLC300's 255-hp, turbocharged four-cylinder packs strong, smooth power, barring the occasional bumpy downshift from the nine-speed automatic.

Handling is responsive if not as crisp as the BMW X3's, with steering feedback that makes the driver feel connected to the road. The GLC struggled through our crash-avoidance test, though, because of an aggressive electronic stability control system that clamped down too hard on the brakes.

Some bumps come through in a pronounced, uncharacteristic way for a Mercedes. Like the C-Class sedan, the GLC suffers from a mushy-feeling brake pedal, although it stopped short in our panic-braking test.

The front seats are comfortable and benefit from four-way lumbar support. As with other Mercedes models, the steering wheel blocks large chunks of information within the driver's screen. The rear seat offers generous headroom and lots of foot space, but the seatback forces passengers to sit at attention and doesn't recline.

Hard-to-master, touch-sensitive controls also mar the experience. Adjustments to the radio, climate, and cruise control require more focus than pressing a physical button or turning a knob.

AEB with pedestrian detection, highway-speed AEB, BSW, and RCTW come standard.

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **Four SUVs, One Recommendation** The Hornet and Tonale underperform, Mercedes' GLC gets a redesign, and extra length makes the Highlander more grand.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results													Active Safety Features		
		Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW/RCTW
COMPACT SUVs																		
✓ **Subaru Forester** 2.5L	88	⇈	↑	90	28	465	↑ / ⇈	⇈	|	↑	↑	↑	53.0	9.2	130	S	S	O
✓ **Honda CR-V** 1.5T	85	↑	↑	88	26	360	↑ / ⇈	⇈	↑	↑	|	↑	54.0	8.8	129	S	S	O
✓ **Toyota RAV4** 2.5L	75	↑	↓	73	27	395	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	|	|	↑	54.0	8.3	131	S	S	O
✓ **Mazda CX-5** 2.5L	75	↑	|	77	24	370	↑ / ↑	|	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.0	8.6	133	S	S	S
Dodge Hornet 2.0T	55	|	↑	59	23	315	↑ / |	↓	|	↓	|	↑	55.0	6.4	132	S	S	S
MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs																		
✓ **Kia Telluride** 3.8L	84	|	⇈	92	21	390	↑ / ⇈	↑	⇈	↑	↑	|	53.5	7.2	127	S	S	S
✓ **Hyundai Palisade** 3.8L	83	↑	↑	85	21	395	↑ / ⇈	↑	⇈	↑	↑	|	52.5	7.1	132	S	S	S
✓ **Mazda CX-90** 3.3T	82	↑	↓	85	24	435	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.0	7.2	128	S	S	S
✓ **Toyota Highlander** 2.4T	80	↑	|	82	22	400	↑ / ⇈	↑	↑	↑	↑	|	52.0	7.7	133	S	S	S
✓ **Toyota Grand Highlander** 2.4T	80	↑	↑	81	22	390	↑ / ⇈	↑	↑	↑	↑	|	49.0	8.0	134	S	S	S
✓ **Subaru Ascent** 2.4T	79	|	↑	90	22	420	↑ / ⇈	⇈	↑	⇈	↑	|	52.0	8.0	129	S	S	O
✓ **Honda Pilot** 3.5L	77	|	⇈	85	21	380	↑ / ↑	⇈	↑	↑	↑	|	51.5	7.7	129	S	S	O
LUXURY ENTRY-LEVEL SUVs																		
✓ **Toyota RAV4 Prime** 2.5H+E 🍃	86	⇈	↑	85	94[1]/ 34[2]	500	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	51.0	6.3	142	S	S	S
✓ **BMW X1** 2.0T	79	|	⇊	86	28	405	⇈ / ↑	↓	↑	|	⇈	↑	54.0	7.1	124	S	S	S
✓ **Lexus UX250h** 2.0H	78	⇈	↓	75	37	395	↑ / ↓	|	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.0	8.8	137	S	S	S
Alfa Romeo Tonale 1.3T+E	56	↓	↑	71	77[1]/ 29[2]	320	↑ / |	↓	|	|	|	↑	53.5	6.3	131	S	S	S
LUXURY COMPACT SUVs																		
✓ **BMW X3** 2.0T	86	↑	↑	90	24	410	⇈ / ↑	|	⇈	↑	⇈	↑	50.5	7.7	128	S	O	S
✓ **Lexus NX350** 2.4T	72	|	|	78	25	360	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	⇈	↑	53.5	7.2	127	S	S	S
Audi Q5 2.0T	67	|	↓	82	24	455	↑ / ↑	|	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.5	6.8	130	S	S	S
Genesis GV70 2.5T	63	↓	↑	81	24	410	⇈ / ↑	⇊	↑	↑	⇈	↑	54.5	7.5	135	S	S	S
Volvo XC60 2.0T	60	↓	↓	77	23	430	⇈ / ↑	↓	↑	|	⇈	↑	52.0	8.0	124	S	S	S
Alfa Romeo Stelvio 2.0T	57	↓	|	74	24	410	| / |	↓	↑	↑	↑	⇈	52.5	7.0	132	S	S	S
Mercedes-Benz GLC300 2.0T	51	⇊	↑	78	26	450	⇈ / ↑	↓	↑	|	⇈	↑	51.0	6.6	127	S	S	S

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines **road-test results,** survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction,** and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. A dash (–) means no such safety system is offered; O means that it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes to prevent the vehicle from rolling away.

⇊ ↓ | ↑ ⇈ WORSE —— BETTER

✓ CR RECOMMENDED

🍃 CR GREEN CHOICE

[1] Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe). [2] Miles per gallon while running on gas engine.

Index

THIS INDEX LISTS ALL THE ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN THE MAGAZINE OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS (INCLUDING THIS ISSUE). FOR INDEXES COVERING THE PAST FIVE YEARS, GO TO **CR.ORG/5YEARINDEX**.

A

Accounts, online, managing ... Jul 23, 38
Aging healthily ... Sep 23, 24
Air fryers, ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 92
Air purifiers ... Aug 23, 13
  Alen BreatheSmart 75i Pure vs. Blueair Blue Pure 211i Max ... Feb 24, 61
Air travel tips ... Oct 23, 40
  airline ratings ... Oct 23, 47
Alcohol ... Nov/Dec 23, 50
  healthy drinking tips ... Nov/Dec 23, 56
Appliances
  bargains ... Jul 23, 12
  cooking ... Nov/Dec 23, 74; Feb 24, 39

AUTOMOBILE RATINGS

Alfa Romeo Tonale ... Mar 24, 57
BMW i4 ... May/Jun 23, 108
BMW iX ... Jul 23, 61
BMW X1 ... May/Jun 23, 110
Chevrolet Trax ... Nov/Dec 23, 108
Dodge Hornet ... Mar 24, 58
Genesis GV70 EV ... Feb 24, 58
Honda Accord Hybrid ... Sep 23, 61
Honda CR-V Hybrid ... Oct 23, 61
Honda Pilot ... Aug 23, 62
Hyundai Ioniq 6 ... Nov/Dec 23, 110
Kia Niro EV ... Jul 23, 61
Lexus RX ... Jul 23, 62
Lexus RXh ... Jul 23, 62
Lexus RZ ... Nov/Dec 23, 109
Lucid Air ... Aug 23, 61
Maserati Grecale ... Sep 23, 61
Mazda CX-90 ... Jan 24, 58
Mercedes-Benz EQE ... Oct 23, 61
  SUV ... Jan 24, 58
Mercedes-Benz EQS SUV ... Sep 23, 62
Mercedes-Benz GLC ... Mar 24, 58
Nissan Ariya ... Feb 24, 57
Nissan Z ... Sep 23, 62
Range Rover Sport ... Aug 23, 62
Rivian R1S ... Oct 23, 62
Subaru Crosstrek ... Jan 24, 57
Subaru Impreza ... Feb 24, 57
Subaru Solterra ... Aug 23, 61
Top Picks for 2023 ... Apr 23, 6
Toyota Corolla Cross Hybrid ... Feb 24, 58
Toyota Crown ... Oct 23, 62
Toyota Grand Highlander ... Mar 24, 57
Toyota Highlander ... May/Jun 23, 109
Toyota Prius ... Jan 24, 57
Toyota Sequoia ... Jul 23, 62

AUTOMOBILES & AUTO EQUIPMENT

Batteries ... Feb 24, 15
Best & Worst lists 2023 ... Apr 23, 14
BMW i4 vs. Tesla Model 3 ... Feb 24, 61
BMW X1 vs. Mazda CX-50 ... Mar 24, 61
BMW Z4 vs. Mazda MX-5 Miata ... Aug 23, 13
Brand Report Card ... Apr 23, 12
Buying tips, pricy dealership extras ... Apr 23, 34
Coming in 2023 ... Apr 23, 18
Controls, easiest to use ... May/Jun 23, 107
Crash alerts ... Aug 23, 5
Driver assistance systems ... Apr 23, 20
  safety ... Mar 24, 5
Electric vehicles
  cost savings ... Apr 23, 28
  range ... Apr 23, 97
Fun-to-drive cars ... Mar 24, 56
Infotainment systems ... Aug 23, 54
  brand ratings ... Aug 23, 58
Insurance ... Nov/Dec 23, 100
  provider ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 106
Maintenance and repair costs ... May/Jun 23, 100
Motor oil ... Jan 24, 56
MPG, cars with best ... Nov/Dec 23, 17
Navigation system types ... Feb 24, 56
New cars 2023
  ratings ... Apr 23, 36
  reviews ... Apr 23, 46
Owner satisfaction ... Mar 24, 50
  brand ratings ... Mar 24, 53
Owner's manuals ... Sep 23, 60
Parking technology ... Sep 23, 11
Popular cars to avoid ... Jul 23, 54
Reliability ... Apr 23, 84; Jan 24, 50
  2024 predictions ... Jan 24, 54
  brand comparisons ... Jan 24, 53
  ratings ... Apr 23, 86
Roadside assistance ... Aug 23, 60
Safe model picks ... Oct 23, 55
Safety features ... Oct 23, 54
Shifter tips ... Nov/Dec 23, 107
Subaru Legacy vs. Toyota Crown ... Jan 24, 65
Tires ... Feb 24, 50
  ratings ... Feb 24, 53
  retailer ratings ... Feb 24, 52
Used cars ... Apr 23, 80; Sep 23, 54
Warranties ... Jul 23, 60
Winter preparation ... Oct 23, 60

B–D

Backyard decor & gear ... Jul 23, 40
Bathrooms ... Aug 23, 46
  showers and tubs ... Aug 23, 48
    showerheads ... Aug 23, 49
  toilets ... Aug 23, 50
    ratings ... Aug 23, 52
  towels ... Aug 23, 48
Battery safety ... Mar 24, 5
Beans ... Jan 24, 16
Blenders ... Aug 23, 11
Blood pressure ... Jan 24, 18
  monitor ratings ... Jan 24, 23
Broadband internet availability ... Nov/Dec 23, 5
Buy now, pay later loans ... Sep 23, 5
Cameras ... Nov/Dec 23, 20
  ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 25
Candy, 100-calorie portions ... Oct 23, 15
Canned cocktails ... Jul 23, 15
Chocolate, heavy metals in ... Mar 24, 14
Cleaning tips ... Aug 23, 16
  laundry stain removal ... Sep 23, 21
Clothing steamers ... Oct 23, 11
Cocktails, canned ... Jul 23, 15
Coffee makers ... Mar 24, 11
Cold relief ... Feb 24, 11
Computers, desktop ... May/Jun 23, 20
  ratings ... May/Jun 23, 25
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau ... Aug 23, 5
Cooking appliances ... Nov/Dec 23, 74
Cooktops, ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 82
Cookware
  nonstick, PFAS in ... May/Jun 23, 52
  ratings ... May/Jun 23, 58
Credit reports ... Jan 24, 5
Customer service ... Nov/Dec 23, 44
Data privacy ... May/Jun 23, 5; Jan 24, 5
  tax returns ... Nov/Dec 23, 5
Desktop computers ... May/Jun 23, 20
  ratings ... May/Jun 23, 25
Detergents
  dishwasher ... Oct 23, 21
  laundry, ratings ... Sep 23, 22
Device charging ... Nov/Dec 23, 68
Device repair ... Mar 24, 34
Digital cleanup ... Jul 23, 34
Digital finance ... Feb 24, 32
Dishwashers ... Oct 23, 18
  ratings ... May/Jun 23, 37; Oct 23, 22
Drinking water safety ... Jan 24, 24
  filters ... Jan 24, 31
    ratings ... Jan 24, 32
Drugs, prescription, costs ... Aug 23, 40
Duvets ... Mar 24, 16

E–G

E-bikes ... Aug 23, 14
  battery safety ... Sep 23, 5
Electronics, disposing of ... Jul 23, 34
Emails, unwanted, managing in Gmail ... Jul 23, 39
Energy level ... Jan 24, 12
Eyeglasses ... Oct 23, 34
  provider ratings ... Oct 23, 39
Fake online reviews ... Aug 23, 12
Fees
  hidden ... Mar 24, 44
  unfair ... Jul 23, 5; Oct 23, 5; Feb 24, 5
Food processors
  Breville Sous Chef 16 Pro vs. Cuisinart Pro Custom 11 ... Jan 24, 65
Food safety ... Oct 23, 24; Feb 24, 5
  lettuce ... Aug 23, 15
  seafood ... Jul 23, 24
  timeline ... Oct 23, 12
"Forever chemicals"
  in cookware ... May/Jun 23, 52
  in water ... Jul 23, 5
Frozen pipes, preventing ... Jan 24, 14
Frozen pizza ... Aug 23, 34
  cooking tips ... Aug 23, 37
Furniture tip-over safety ... May/Jun 23, 5; Nov/Dec 23, 5
Gifts for $35 or less ... Nov/Dec 23, 11
Glass cleaners ... Jan 24, 13
Glasses ... Oct 23, 34
  provider ratings ... Oct 23, 39
Grocery shopping tips ... Mar 24, 12
Guacamole ... May/Jun 23, 14

H–K

Headaches ... Feb 24, 42
  supplements for ... Feb 24, 48
Headphones ... May/Jun 23, 78
  ratings ... May/Jun 23, 78
Healthy aging ... Sep 23, 24
Healthy drinks ... Mar 24, 38
  timeline ... Mar 24, 12
Hearing aids ... May/Jun 23, 44
  brand and retailer ratings ... May/Jun 23, 51
Heavy metals in dark chocolate ... May/Jun 23, 5
Hidden fees ... Mar 24, 44
Home entertainment ... May/Jun 23, 76
Home office ... May/Jun 23, 20
Homeowners insurance ... Sep 23, 46
  provider ratings ... Sep 23, 52
Insect repellents ... Sep 23, 16
Insurance
  car ... Nov/Dec 23, 100
    provider ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 106
  pet ... Jan 24, 40
    provider ratings ... Jan 24, 43
Internet access away from home ... Oct 23, 48
Junk fees ... Mar 24, 44
Kitchen tools ... Feb 24, 36
  meat thermometers ... Feb 24, 61
Kitchens ... Nov/Dec 23, 60
Knives, steak ... Oct 23, 14

L–P

Laptops
  Acer Chromebook Vero 514 CBV514-1H-34X9 vs. Lenovo IdeaPad Slim 3 14IAN8 Chromebook ... Mar 24, 61
Laundry detergents ... Sep 23, 18
  ratings ... Sep 23, 22
Lawn mowers ... May/Jun 23, 15
Leftovers, reheating tips ... Mar 24, 22
Lettuce, safety ... Aug 23, 15
Lighting ... Jan 24, 34
  timeline ... Jan 24, 12
Machine-washable rugs ... May/Jun 23, 18
Mattresses
  shopping tips ... Nov/Dec 23, 16; Mar 24, 24
  ratings ... Mar 24, 31
Meat thermometers
  Con ProAccurate TCT572-R vs. ThermoPro Digital TP19H ... Feb 24, 61
Microwaves, ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 88
Milk ... Sep 23, 40
  timeline ... Sep 23, 12
Money saving on prescription drugs ... Aug 23, 40
Olive oil ... Jan 24, 44
  ratings ... Jan 24, 47
Online reviews, fake ... Aug 23, 12
Online shopping, product safety ... Oct 23, 5
Ovens, wall, ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 86
Paper shredders ... Jan 24, 15
Patio decor & gear ... Jul 23, 40
Peanut butters ... Feb 24, 14
Peer-to-peer payment apps ... Jul 23, 5
Pet insurance ... Jan 24, 40
  provider ratings ... Jan 24, 43
Pie pans ... Feb 24, 13
Pizza, frozen ... Aug 23, 34
  cooking tips ... Aug 23, 37
Plant milks ... Sep 23, 40
Plastics
  in food ... Feb 24, 24
    food-specific levels ... Feb 24, 30
  timeline ... Feb 24, 12
Popcorn, bagged ... Sep 23, 14
Posture tips ... Feb 24, 16
Prescription drugs, costs ... Aug 23, 40
Pressure washers ... Jul 23, 16
Printers ... May/Jun 23, 20; Sep 23, 15
  ratings ... May/Jun 23, 26

R–S

Ranges ... Nov/Dec 23, 76
  ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 76
Right to repair ... Aug 23, 5; Feb 24, 5
Rugs, machine-washable ... May/Jun 23, 18
Saving money
  on groceries ... Mar 24, 12
  on prescription drugs ... Aug 23, 40
Scams ... Aug 23, 24
  security tips ... Aug 23, 29
Seafood
  safety ... Jul 23, 24
  timeline ... Jul 23, 12
Selling used items ... Sep 23, 34
Shopping tips
  groceries ... Mar 24, 12
  mattresses ... Nov/Dec 23, 16; Mar 24, 24
  online, product safety ... Oct 23, 5
Showers ... Aug 23, 48
  showerheads ... Aug 23, 49
Shredders ... Jan 24, 15
Sleep, cooling ... Jul 23, 11
Smart speakers ... May/Jun 23, 80; Jan 24, 11
  ratings ... May/Jun 23, 80
Smartphones
  disposing of ... Jul 23, 34
  hidden features ... Oct 23, 12
  keeping charged ... Nov/Dec 23, 68
Smartwatches ... Aug 23, 18
  ratings ... Aug 23, 22
Soundbars ... May/Jun 23, 84
  ratings ... May/Jun 23, 84
Sparkling water ... Oct 23, 16
Speakers
  smart ... May/Jun 23, 80
    ratings ... May/Jun 23, 80
  wireless ... May/Jun 23, 82
    ratings ... May/Jun 23, 82
Steak knives ... Oct 23, 14
Steam mops ... Nov/Dec 23, 14
Steamers, clothing ... Oct 23, 11
Step count ... Sep 23, 12
Streaming
  devices ... May/Jun 23, 98
    ratings ... May/Jun 23, 98
Subscription canceling tips ... Mar 24, 13
Summer gear ... May/Jun 23, 11
Sunscreens ... Jul 23, 18
  ratings ... Jul 23, 21
Sustainability at home ... May/Jun 23, 28

T–W

Tax return privacy ... Nov/Dec 23, 5
Tech support ... Mar 24, 34
Tick safety ... May/Jun 23, 13
Ticket sale junk fees ... Sep 23, 5
Toaster ovens ... Mar 24, 18
  ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 94; Mar 24, 23
Toasters, ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 96
Toilets ... Aug 23, 50
  ratings ... Aug 23, 52
Top product picks ... Nov/Dec 23, 28
  timeline ... Nov/Dec 23, 14
Towels, bathroom ... Aug 23, 48
Travel
  airline ratings ... Oct 23, 47
  bargains ... May/Jun 23, 60
  flying tips ... Oct 23, 40
Turkey ... Nov/Dec 23, 15
TVs ... May/Jun 23, 86
  ratings ... May/Jun 23, 86
  tips and tricks ... Feb 24, 12
Vacuums ... Feb 24, 18
  ratings ... Feb 24, 22
Waffle makers
  Breville Smart Waffle Pro 4 Slice vs. Chefman Anti-Overflow Belgian Waffle Maker ... Mar 24, 61
Walking, step count ... Sep 23, 12
Wall ovens, ratings ... Nov/Dec 23, 86
Warranties ... Jul 23, 48
Washer ratings ... May/Jun 23, 40
Water
  filters ... Jan 24, 31
    ratings ... Jan 24, 32
  "forever chemicals" in ... Jul 23, 5
  safety ... Jan 24, 24
  sparkling ... Oct 23, 16
Water beads ... Jan 24, 5; Mar 24, 5
Wireless speakers ... May/Jun 23, 82

The Better Deal

Many of the products we test at CR earn high ratings for their impressive performance—but some are also a really great value. Check out the terrific deals we found for you this month.

SUVs

✓ BMW X1
$40,500-$49,900 79

THE BETTER DEAL

✓ MAZDA CX-50
$30,300-$43,300 77

THE LOWDOWN

THE REDESIGNED BMW X1 has more power, efficiency, and interior room than previous generations. But it's pricey—and costs a lot to gas up (it takes only premium). The Mazda CX-50 has similar handling and a bit more interior space. Even the well-equipped CX-50 Premium Plus we tested ($38,620) significantly undercuts the X1's as-tested price ($46,495). What's more, both predicted reliability and owner satisfaction scores are higher for the CX-50.

WAFFLE MAKERS

✓ BREVILLE SMART WAFFLE PRO 4 SLICE
$250 89

✓ CHEFMAN ANTI-OVERFLOW BELGIAN WAFFLE MAKER
$40 76

THE BETTER DEAL

THE LOWDOWN

IF YOU REALLY LOVE WAFFLES, the top-rated $250 Breville may be for you. It aced all of our tests, turning out evenly cooked waffles with the exact level of doneness you want. Its exterior stays cool to the touch, and the Breville makes four large squares at once. But it does take up a lot of space. For over $200 less, the Chefman also makes superb, evenly cooked waffles—albeit in a smaller size. It has a light to dark setting and shows when a waffle is done. The outside of the Chefman does get hot. But it's compact and stores neatly on its side.

CHROMEBOOKS

✓ LENOVO IDEAPAD SLIM 3 14IAN8 CHROMEBOOK
$550 85

THE BETTER DEAL

✓ ACER CHROMEBOOK VERO 514 CBV514-1H-34X9
$350 84

THE LOWDOWN

THESE TWO Chromebooks are just one point apart in our ratings. They both have entry-level Intel processors and the same amount of memory and storage. The Lenovo has a touchscreen for more convenient navigation, and a slightly longer battery life—but both should last about a day before requiring a recharge. If you don't need a touchscreen, the budget-friendly Acer is a good bet.

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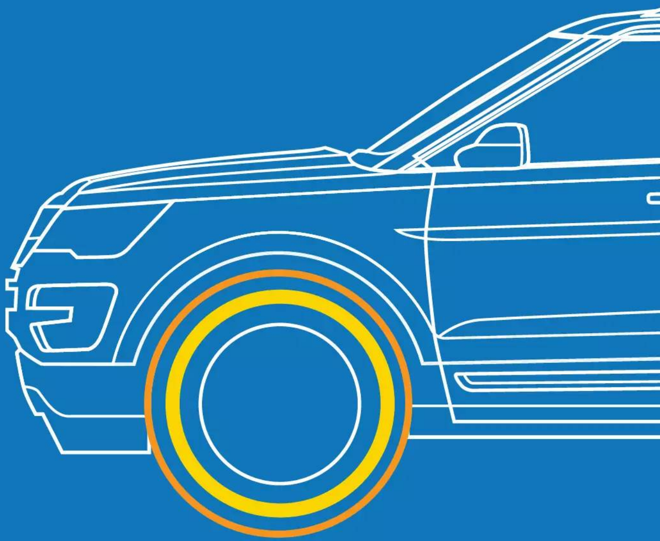

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